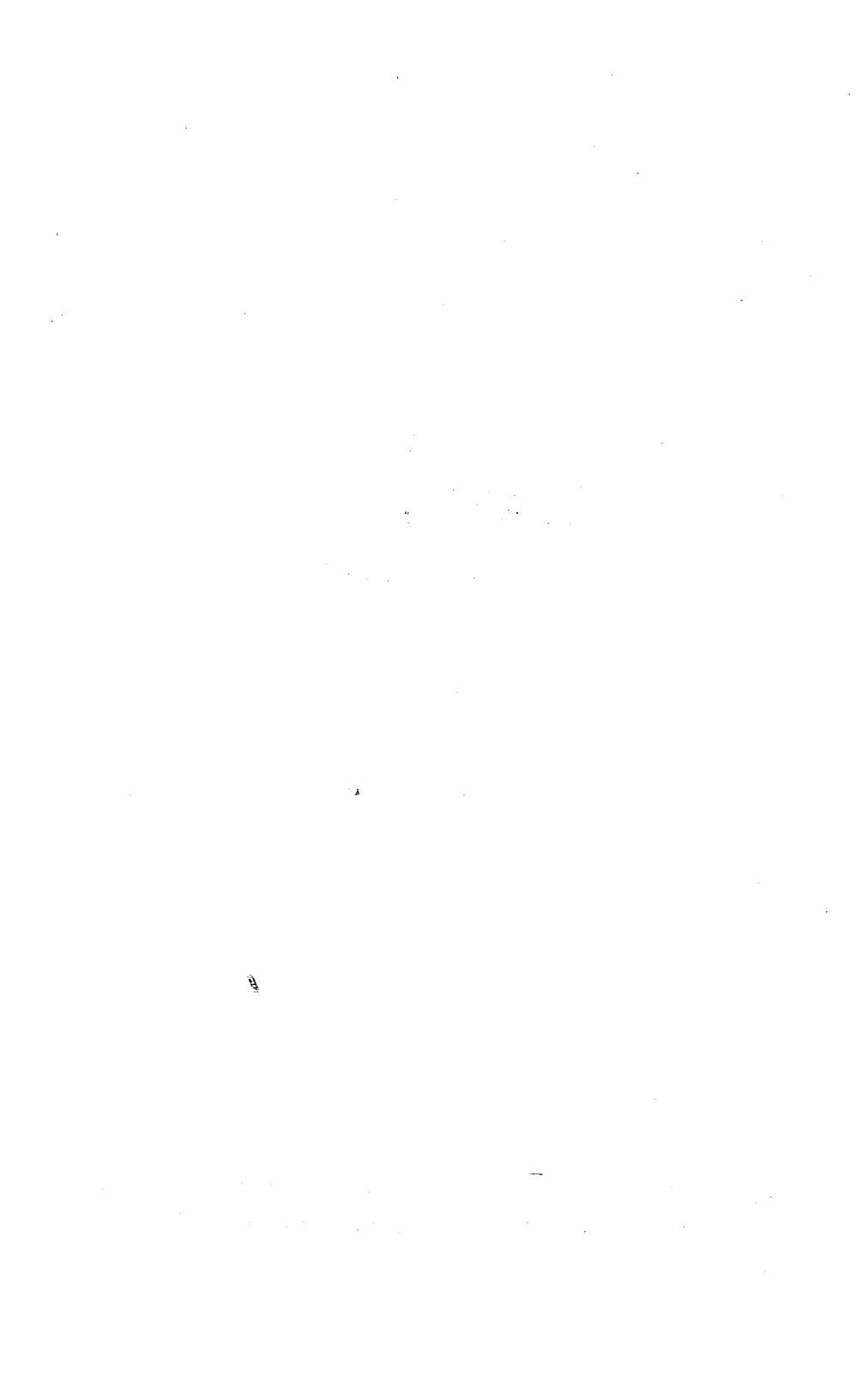


THE GOSPEL
OF
MATTHEW



BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

**THE GOSPEL
OF
MATTHEW**

Volume Two

by

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THE PROBLEM OF ORDER IN
MATTHEW'S NARRATION

Is this section really a series of events subsequent to the Sermon on the Mount? It would seem so upon first reading Matthew's text alone. Yet the most cursory comparison with Mark's and Luke's Gospels, of the events included in this section, reveals that there are clear differences in order and emphasis. (See Volume I, Introduction, pp. 4, 5) If it is really Matthew's intention to follow a topical, rather than a chronological, arrangement, we need not be concerned if Mark and Luke both record much of this material in Matthew's chapters eight and nine in relationship to other events. Again, it seems clear that Matthew is illustrating the summary of Jesus' Galilean ministry mentioned in 4:23-25, by means of a good example of His preaching (chaps. 5-7) and ten good samples of His miracles (chaps. 8, 9). If so, must there be necessary time and place connections between each of the samples? Would not logical connection suffice for what we deem to be

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Matthew's evident purpose? Matthew concludes the section (chaps. 5-9) in the way he began (cf. 9:35 with 4:23-25), adding the note concerning the need for laborers in the harvest, a note which prepares his readers for the next major section (chapter 10) containing the commission of the Twelve to evangelize Galilee.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THESE MIRACLE STORIES?

What is the singular importance of Matthew's placing a collection of Jesus' miracles together here in this place in chapters eight and nine? The relationship to Matthew's whole plan, as we can determine it from his end result, is that he, as a writer of brilliantly clear narration, has given us a quick outline of his project (4:23-25) and now sketches in the outline with examples. He might even be responding to an unspoken demand: "We have heard this visionary who gives us high ideals. But what can He do? Can He DO as well as DREAM? And, better yet, can He make US doers?" It might just well be that Matthew places this striking collection of miracles right after the Sermon on the Mount to provide conclusive evidence that Jesus is not just a dreamer, but also One who really has the power to make us over into whatever image He demands. The miracles Matthew presents do not say merely that this Jesus is a wonder-worker, but, primarily, that this Jesus can throw in the super-natural difference between what we are and what He wants us to be. Best of all, He who has such wonderful power can also transform our feeble wills, our blind eyes, our demonic desires, our double-mindedness, our spiritual insensitiveness to all that is important to God, our emotional storms, our physical wretchedness—all this and more He can transform into a person of usefulness to God. Incidentally, we must admit that He has chosen not to transform us by a sudden word of power, because He, our Creator knows that the fashioning of character takes time and countless lessons learned through the practice of obedience to His Word. But that is just the point: the gospel itself is His word of power to transform us into His likeness. Matthew knew, just as did the other Apostles (See Jn. 5:30-47; 10:37, 38; 14:10, 11) that Jesus' miracles were but the authentication of God, given as credentials to prove that Jesus knew what He was talking about, regardless of whatever claim He might make.

And so it is that Jesus "came down off the mountain" figuratively too, so as to meet people's need at the level where they live. It is no wonder that great multitudes could follow a Savior like Jesus who was not satisfied to thunder lofty ideals from His ivory tower on the

INTRODUCTION

heights of the mountain but was willing to walk and work among needy people. But notice that He did not merely attend to their most pressing need, as they themselves viewed that need, but He responded to their need in such a way as to accomplish at the same time His higher purpose. Matthew's outline draws our attention to Jesus' genius for combining His merciful ministry to real human need at any level with His presentation of His credentials as being truly a "visitor from outer space" come to earth to bring a message of earth-shaking importance.

In these two chapters Matthew arranges his material into ten demonstrations of Jesus' might. These can be arranged into groups of three miracles each followed by a response, the third group having actually four exemplary wonders and two scandals.

But a caution is in order here: we must never destroy the quality of these miracle stories as history in order simply to draw some parabolic teaching from them. They are told by the eyewitnesses as the sober history of facts which actually occurred upon which the secure conclusion is drawn that the miracle worker is thus identified as from God. A secondary purpose for miracles is to show God's mercifulness in practical ways in direct response to some need of men. And yet, despite this caution urging us to let the eyewitnesses tell their story, as we read this history we cannot help identifying ourselves in the stories with the leper, with the Centurion, with Peter's wife's mother, with the demoniacs, the four men who brought their paralyzed friend, with Matthew the publican, with Jairus and his wife and countless others. If we take these stories seriously as true narrations of real events, we cannot but begin to identify ourselves and our problems in these stories. Perhaps Plummer (*Matthew*, 123) is right when he argues for a third intention behind miracles:

Perhaps the (Jesus') touch (of the leper) was also necessary for the sake of the millions who were to read of this cleansing. No *moral* pollution can be so great as to make Christ shrink from contact with a sinner, who comes to Him with a desire to be freed from his plague, and with the belief that He has the power to free him. Christ's miracles are parables. That was part of their purpose when they were wrought, and it is their chief meaning to us . . .

Plummer's metaphor ("Christ's miracles are parables.") must not distract us from the principle truth that our psychological reaction to these facts is parabolic in nature. Psychologically we reason thus: "If Jesus can treat with such tender sympathy this wretched sufferer, He can certainly cleanse me too." Although this begins to be argument

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from analogy from which the conclusions are always doubtful, yet the factual character of the narrations and the conclusions drawn from them by the Apostles in their doctrine assures us that our identification with the miserable characters helped by Jesus was no misplaced confidence.

But if it be objected that we cannot rely for our applied conclusions upon this psychological (intuited) self-identification in the persons whom Jesus loved and helped, then let us remember that, though it is true that we have often identified ourselves with the mythical figures of fairy stories as children or the heroes of dramatized fictions of later years, fully knowing that they never existed, how much more surely can we see ourselves being blessed and helped in these narrations of *fact!* What was it that drew the multitudes to Jesus for healing and blessing? Was it not the news spreading like wildfire that He had helped others, coupled with the conclusion of the suffering individuals that perhaps He could and would help them too, if they could but get to Him? (cf. Jn. 4:45-47; Lk. 5:15; Mt. 4:24-25; Mk. 3:7-12) Our measure of sanity is best gauged by that degree to which we acknowledge the real world and reject the world of fancy. It was into this real world that Jesus came to do His works, reveal to us the Father and call us to enter His service.

But, again, the compelling power of these miracle stories recorded by the four Evangelists lies in the authenticity of the facts. While it is true that men can be led to believe the most monstrous falsehoods, yet anyone who endeavors to construct a reasoned picture of the life of Christ that ignores the factual character of the miracles, must be confounded by the fact that Jesus' life had no sooner ended in apparent failure and defeat, than the entire company of His disciples began immediately to proclaim Him to be a God. They did this against great psychological hazards and unspeakable physical difficulties. Also striking for its absence is the testimony of any first-century contemporary of the early witnesses that denies the reality of any facts involved in the miracles. How did it happen then that the Apostles and early Christians concluded that Jesus was God and worthy of their worship and service if there were nothing in His life to distinguish it from that of ordinary men or that would identify His ministry as supernatural and His person divine? (See special study on miracles at conclusion of chapter nine.)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 12. Jesus Heals a Leper (8:1-4)

Section 13. Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (8:5-13)

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Section 14. Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law (8:14-17)

Section 15. Jesus Calls Men to Discipleship (8:18-22)

Section 16. Jesus Stills a Tempest (8:23-27)

Section 17. Jesus Frees the Gadarene Demoniacs (8:28—9:1)

JESUS' RELATION TO THE OUTCASTS OF ISRAEL

(The following were suggested by Wm. Barclay, [I, 298-300]:)

- I. Jesus Touched the Untouchable. Here we see the man who was kept at arm's length by all men, wrapped around with the pity and compassion of the love of God. (8:2-4)
- II. Jesus Loved the Unloveable. Here we see the love of God going out to help the foreigner and the slave whom men either hated or despised.
- III. Jesus Healed the Unknown, Humble Folk. Here we see the infinite love of God of all the universe displaying all its power where there was none but the family circle to see (8:14, 15), to Whom any man at any hour might come without being thought a nuisance. (8:16, 17)
- IV. Jesus Challenged the Badly Motivated. (8:18-22)
 - A. The scribe, the short-sighted enthusiast in danger of shallow zeal.
 - B. The disciple already committed to any other duty in danger of tragic failure to seize the greatest opportunity.
- V. Jesus Calmed the Uncalmable. Here is the power of God bringing peace and serenity into tumult and confusion. (8:23-27)
- VI. Jesus Tamed the Untameable. Here we see the power of God dealing with Satan's power, God's goodness invading earth's evil, God's love going out against evil's malignancy and malevolence. Here we see the goodness and love of God which save men by triumphantly overcoming the evil and hatred which ruin men. (8:28—9:1)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 12

JESUS HEALS A LEPER

(Parallels: Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)

TEXT: 8:2-4

2. And behold, there came to him a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
3. And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou made clean. And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.
4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priests, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus accepted the worship of this miserable leper. If Jesus is not God come in the flesh, what should one think of Jesus for accepting? Or was this "worship" that one must render God alone?
- b. What insight do you gain into the nature of true worship in this leper's request, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst . . . "?
- c. What is significant about Jesus' touching the leper?
- d. If leprosy was a dread disease, why does Matthew say Jesus "cleansed" him instead of "healed" him?
- e. Why was it important for the cleansed leper to "tell no man"?
- f. Why was it necessary for the leper to show himself to the priest and make an offering?
- g. Why would the priests need to know that the leper had been healed "for a testimony unto them"?
- h. What do you think Jesus' deepest purpose was in commanding the cleansed leper to "tell no man"? Could not Jesus foresee his disobedience to such a difficult command? Or, foreseeing that the man could not keep such good news quiet, Jesus might have used reverse psychology to get the maximum advantage of news coverage through a rapidly spread "secret". What is your opinion?
- i. Do you think, in light of the previous question, that the man was entirely blameworthy for his actions? Are his actions true to normal human psychology; i.e. are they actions that we would normally expect people to do under similar circumstances? If so, does this mitigate his responsibility for disobeying Jesus' specific prohibition?
- j. What is your opinion? Jesus touched the leper. Do you think that Jesus was legally (in relation to Moses' law on defilement) unclean until sunset that day and until He had bathed Himself? On what basis do you answer as you do? This question may not seem too important to moderns, but upon how you answer may depend how much significance you attribute to Jesus' spontaneous but meaningful gesture.

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

While Jesus was in one of the cities, a leper approached Him when he saw Him. He was a mass of leprosy, covered with it, Coming up to Jesus and falling to his knees, he bowed his face to the earth in front of Him and begged Him for help, "Sir, if only You are willing, You can cleanse me because You are able to do it!"

Jesus' heart was moved with compassion and, stretching forth His hand, He touched the leper, saying as He did so, "Indeed, I am willing! Become clean." Instantly he was cleansed of the leprosy, for it left him. Jesus dismissed the former leper with this stern warning, "Be sure that you tell nobody; but go to the priests for your physical examination, and offer the gift Moses commanded in Leviticus 14, for your recovery. Do this as a public proof—as evidence to the authorities and the people—of the reality of your cure."

But the man went away and began to talk freely about it and spread the news so much that more than ever Jesus' reputation was well-known. Consequently, it became impossible for Jesus to show Himself in a town but He stayed outside in the open country which was sparsely settled. Yet great multitudes of people came to Jesus from every quarter to hear His message and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus continued in His habit of retiring from time to time to lonely places to pray.

SUMMARY

When a leper in the last stages of his disease came to Jesus in one of the Galilean cities, humbly and desperately seeking cleansing, Jesus touched him, speaking but a word of power. He then sent the man directly to the priests to undergo the necessary physical examination performed by them and offer, consequently, the proper sacrifice. The man was not to mention his cleansing to anyone prior to that examination but he spoke freely about it to all. His actions rendered Jesus' ministry more difficult because of the excited crowds pressing Him to perform the same miracles on their own sick folk. But Jesus managed to keep up His habit of praying by getting away from people to be alone with God.

NOTES

I. THE LEPER'S REQUEST

8:2 **There came to him a leper.** With this surprising sentence Matthew begins this section which describes the marvellous supernatural

works of Jesus. To be able fully to appreciate Matthew's inclusion of precisely this illustration of Jesus' unfailing compassionate love for outcasts, we must grasp the whole Jewish viewpoint regarding lepers and leprosy. Otherwise, we may fail to see why this sentence is such a surprise. For special help in grasping the Jewish concept of ceremonial and spiritual defilement (Lev. 15:31), seek out the principal passages in the OT on this subject by checking through concordance listings under "defiling, defilement, unclean, uncleanness, common, impure, profane, unholy, polluted".

Leprosy is an infectious condition produced by microbe discovered and described by A. G. Hansen in 1874. Hansen's disease is contagious, its infection being thought to arise from direct contact with infected skin and mucous membranes, although not very readily communicated by casual contact. Seemingly it is not hereditary. Nerve involvement is attended with anaesthesia, tingling and pain of the parts affected. In those forms of leprosy where nodular growths are the most prominent features the small bones of the hands and feet are destroyed and often drop off. Modern medicine has discovered treatments for leprosy of the various types (lepromatous, tuberculoid and non-specific) and control through early diagnosis, isolation and some drugs that show encouraging results, although complete cure is not yet promised. Spontaneous arresting of the disease and temporary cures have occurred. However, treatment is often necessary for years. (See UWRE, 2954; ISBE, 1867)

Some affirm, however, that Hansen's disease is not the biblical leprosy. There are several complications to our problem of identifying precisely the leprosy of the Bible:

1. The Biblical terminology identifying leprosy describe only the initial symptoms and discuss none of the later manifestations as a fully developed disease or attempt a medical description of its characteristics. The purpose of the biblical terminology was originally for identifying and isolating the victims of this disease. It is worthy of note that there is no mention of treatment of remedy for the disease.
2. The biblical term "leprosy" in the critical passage (Lev. 13) is obviously used in several senses, meaning, generally, "skin disease" and, precisely, "leprosy" (the real thing). It would seem that Moses in that passage is describing leprosy and then listing eight other skin diseases which might be confused for leprosy, but which, regarding ceremonial defilement, were "clean".

3. Any remarks derived from the Mosaic legislation would have to be tempered by the actual practice of the Jews in Jesus' time, which may well have been quite different from that intended by Moses. For instance, while Moses required lepers to stay out of inhabited centers (Lev. 13:46), this regulation may have been relaxed in later times so that lepers even entered a segregated portion of the synagogues, although not into the Temple. (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 493)

This circumstance however would not surprise us especially in Galilee where Gentile custom and influence were stronger, producing a more general laxity of rigid Judaism. Further, there are four facts that serve to clarify much ignorance regarding modern prejudices concerning lepers and leprosy:

1. The biblical position regarding lepers and leprosy was stated in relationship to *one* nation of people, the Israelites, to whom the law of Moses, which contains the leprosy legislation, was given. Thus, the prejudices and inhumanity expressed regarding leprosy after the coming of Christ has no basis whatever in Christian documents, since Christ did away with that law *with all of its prescriptions*, whether on leprosy, circumcision, sabbath days or atonement.
2. Although certain biblical cases of leprosy were clearly visitations of the wrath of God (Num. 12:9-15; 2 Kg. 5:25-27; 2 Chron. 26:16-21), this by no means proves that all cases were that. This view of leprosy as a "stroke of God" may explain the usual hauteur with which some rabbis kept lepers at a distance. The defilement that a leper brings to others by contact with them may also explain this. (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 495)
3. Modern medical science has been able to discover medicine that for all practical purposes and under the right conditions of hygiene, does away with the virulent aspects of the disease, promising new hope for lepers which was totally unavailable in Bible times.
4. The chief emphasis of the Levitical legislation in the first place was the defilement which the disease brought to the sufferer, thus rendering him incapable of entering either the camp of Israel or of participating in the formal worship of Jehovah while in the grip of that disease. And it was by a sin offering that the ceremonial uncleanness was atoned for, upon one's cleansing from leprosy. (Lev. 14:13, 14, 18b-22) But the

homiletic use of leprosy as a TYPE of sin is not biblical, although the similarities are striking. Were we to judge leprosy from the ancient Jewish standpoint of defilement, there could possibly be no lower state, nor worse defilement than this; however, estimating the disease from Christ's standpoint, there are certainly worse defilements than mere leprosy. (Study Mt. 15; Mk. 7) Let it be remarked that though leprosy was atoned for by a sin, that is, a guilt offering, yet Jesus never declared the sins forgiven a leper in connection with his disease, in the same way in which He apparently did not hold the demon-possessed as particularly guilty or sinful, or as He did in the case of others (Lk. 7:47-50; Mt. 9:1-8). Yet, from the silence of the Scripture record, no real argument can be made, inasmuch as the Apostles recorded only what we have. But it must be made absolutely clear that leprosy today carries no spiritual contamination to any man as it did only to Jews under Moses law.

There came to him a leper, but not just a leper, for he was "full of leprosy" (Lk. 5:12), hence not clean (Lev. 13:13), because, were the man merely covered with white disease, he could have been pronounced clean without recourse to Jesus. On the other hand, there is an air of desperation in his voice. The fact that he approached Jesus "in one of the cities" (Lk. 5:12) may not prove the desperation of his case, which presumably would have driven him to approach Jesus in one of the cities, for, while the OT law required lepers to stay out of the camp of Israel (Lev. 13:46) and as a matter of practice they were thus excluded (Nu. 5:1-4; 12:13-15; 2 Kg. 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16-23; Lk. 17:12), yet other cases indicate that lepers could enter cities (among Syrians not under the Mosaic law, 2 Kg. 5:1-5; among Jews, Naaman was permitted to enter Samaria, 2 Kg. 5:5-7. Four lepers thought they could enter the city of Samaria, 2 Kg. 7:3, 4). And had the Deuteronomic code specified that all sorts of unclean persons had to leave the city wherein they dwelt after Israel entered the promised land? The Levitical prescription had spoken of the lepers leaving the camp of Israel while Israel dwelt together in one great tent city around the tabernacle in the wilderness. How did the prescription apply upon entering Canaan? Again, Edersheim's note (*Life*, I, 493) should be recalled that lepers were permitted into a segregated compartment in the synagogues also. In what particular city of Galilee the leper approached Jesus is not stated.

We can better appreciate the impression Jesus made upon people

by this simple affirmation: **a leper came to him**. In order to preserve their self-righteous personal ceremonial purity, some rabbis went so far as to declare a distance no less than six feet as sufficient to keep from a leper, but if the wind blew from the direction of the leper, scarcely 100 were sufficient. Others boasted of throwing stones at lepers to keep them at their distance. Another went on record as refusing to eat an egg—the best example of well-packaged food—purchased on a street where a leper had been. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 495). And yet this leper came to Jesus, without precedents in Jewish history, except perhaps the case of the Gentile Naaman (2 Kg. 5), whose position as an outcast of Israel he now shared. It may also be that the Lord had not cleansed any lepers previous to this occasion either; at least Matthew's summary (4:24) does not specifically mention leprosy as an example of Jesus' power. If this observation is correct, we can sense the same difference between Jesus and His contemporaries that this leper must have felt, a difference which awakened in him a long-absent hope that this friendly Galilean could change his vile body into the image of His own healthy human body, and thus caused him to dare to approach Jesus.

and worshiped him (see notes on "worship" at 2:2) Mark and Luke strengthen this expression by noting that the leper kneeled in front of Jesus bowing his head to the ground. From this unashamed expression of deep reverence for Jesus, how much can we deduce of this man's understanding of Jesus' true identity? Is he approaching Jesus with the same respect for Jehovah that caused Naaman to stand before the door of Elisha? Perhaps we can say he intended the highest respect for this Prophet who spoke for the living God and who could, through the power of the Almighty, cleanse him. It is tempting to read more understanding into the leper's confession than he actually grasped of Jesus' Deity. **Lord**, for this Jew, may not have meant all that this glorious title has come to mean to Christians, for until Jesus' full Self-revelation was completed and His highest claims fully justified and His true identity completely announced, it is quite possible that those who addressed Jesus as **Lord** intended little more than the term of courtesy and respect, "Sir" (cf. Mt. 21:29; 25:11; 27:63; 1 Pe. 3:6; Jn. 12:21; 20:15; Ac. 16:30; Rev. 7:14), as also the term *kyrie* is so used in modern Greek. The problem is not how much this man understood of Jesus' true position as Lord of lords, and thus the depth of his devotion, but rather what real content is present in our addressing Him as Lord, given our superior advantages of knowing Him. (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46)

If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. Nowhere has

there ever appeared a better statement of the right basic attitude of prayer, which so trustingly, yearningly lays our otherwise hopeless case upon God's power to help. (See notes on 5:10) The leper probably did not intend this plea as a prayer to deity, but as the disciplined request for cleansing. He meant, and we must mean as we pray,

1. If thou wilt (Luke adds *edeêthê*, "He begged Him.")
 - a. Some have suggested that this leper's expressed uncertainty about Jesus' willingness throws the responsibility for his continued misery upon Jesus who could so easily deliver. Perhaps so, for, psychologically, people are tempted rather fatalistically to blame God for their continued suffering, and with this sighed expression they resign themselves to their fate. Also the usual treatment received at the hands of other rabbis might have taught this leper never to presume upon any.
 - b. It is more probable that the leper's lowly acquiescence intends to leave Jesus free to decide whether to leave him in his horrible contamination or not. It takes deep insight and rigorous discipline to place his case in these terms before Him who is the leper's last hope. As he bravely states his desire, he is committing himself, if Jesus shall so choose, to remain a leper! (cf. Dan. 3:16-18; 2 Sam. 15:24-26) He thus showed a more profound insight into the Lord's authority than some more privileged disciples.
2. **Thou canst make me clean:** "I am sure of your power." No double-mindedness here! (cf. Jas. 1:5-8; Heb. 11:6; Jas. 4:4, 8) Note how immediately the man comes to the point of his petition: "Cleansing, Lord!" No flowery expressions or lengthy appeals to Jesus' reason, understanding or sympathy were needed. Christians can learn more directness in their petitions from this Jew who felt his need deeply and could concentrate it into one sentence.

II. THE LORD'S RESPONSE

8:3 And he stretched forth his hand, and touched him.

To the western mind this verse cannot have the earth-shaking importance it would have had to the Jew trained in Levitical legislation regarding ceremonial purity and defilement. (See on 8:2; Lev. 11:39-45; 13:45, 46; 15:all, esp. 31; 18:24-30; 22:3-9; Nu. 5:1-5; 6:5-9, 12; 19:11-22; Dt. 24:8, 9) These passages clearly require Jewish clergy and laity alike, as well as those under special vows, to maintain

that special separation from certain acts and contacts that were defined by God as "defiling" or "unclean." While it is true that there were certain acts which defiled but were permissible (sexual relations, for example, Lev. 15:18), yet, for the most part, no God-fearing Jew could bring himself to go deliberately against the general order: "You shall not defile yourselves . . . you shall be holy, for I am holy." (Lev. 11:44, 45) without bringing himself under the condemnation: "Thus shall you keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst." (Lev. 15:31)

But what is so eternally important about views on Jewish defilement to the modern Christian whose entire mentality revolves around completely different principles?

1. Because OUR appreciation of this meaningful gesture of Jesus is enhanced as we understand the background in which it comes. Leprosy's attack upon this man brought into the picture all of the heartless application of Moses' Law. The Law was the same for all—heartless, and he, a leper, had been forced by that Law to leave his family, his associations, his life. That same Law required all to clear a heart-chilling circle around him everywhere, none could share with him the warming embraces of love. The Law had perhaps made him even forget how the touch of another's hand felt, for he was now, for the duration of his hopeless case, a fellow-sufferer with others of the living dead. Yet, Jesus, "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:41), swiftly, spontaneously moved to the leper's side, and touched him. This was a demonstration of love we should not soon forget! This was an answer that shouted Jesus' love more than any word could have done. For Jesus, and for those who follow Him, there is but one law: loving helpfulness to anyone who has a need, regardless of the loathsomeness of that which makes his need so apparent. If necessary, we must be prepared to dispense with conventions and take the necessary risks to help a suffering fellow human. This means also that we must be prepared to take the consequences for our actions.
2. Because our understanding of the nature and identity of Jesus of Nazareth is partly contingent upon what we think of this act whereby He seemingly went beyond the express prohibitions of God's Law. The Law had been clear enough against this deliberate defiling oneself through contact with what had been

defined as "unclean". Why must Jesus break the Law—if He, in fact, did? Or, is Jesus, as Author of the Law, hereby revealing a facet of its interpretation and application that we could not have previously known?

- a. Is he revealing that the Law is not the only or perfect expression of perfect righteousness, and that much of the loving compassion for suffering humanity, which God Himself really felt, had to be omitted from the Law's legal prescriptions? If so, by His actions Jesus is saying, "Friend, the Law says I cannot touch you, but God's mercy, which triumphs over strict justice, permits it." This seeming disregarding of the ceremonial law is on the same level as those acts which, though, strictly speaking, are violations of the Mosaic legislation or interpretations thereof, are yet acts in which not only Jesus, but any man could rise higher than the strict application of the law, so as to show mercy and kindness to these miserable, suffering neighbors to every Jew. Lev. 19:18 is also legislation on the treatment of lepers too, and more people than Jews failed to see this.
- b. Is Jesus revealing here, as elsewhere, that any Jew could have ministered mercifully to these unfortunate sufferers? (See on Mt. 12:1-8) If so, Jesus may be saying, "Though the safe course for any man is not to touch you because of the absence of adequate medicines whereby you could be healed and brought back into the circle of human fellowship again, yet I am that medicine, hence, I am the only one truly qualified to bridge the gap and bring you back to health." Is Jesus' action intended to teach us that the law of loving-kindness is above the law of ceremonies? (cf. Mt. 9:12, 13; 12:1-14) Certainly, He is teaching that, although the Law heartlessly had to separate the "unclean" from the "clean" to preserve holiness, there was however no excuse whatever that could justify all the inhuman traditions and heartless cruelties on the part of the ceremonially "clean, pure and righteous."
- c. Could it be that Jesus is also revealing the end of the entire system of ceremonial defilements? This He will do on other occasions and by means of the very character of the gospel (cf. Mt. 15:1-20). If so, this incident is in perfect harmony with other revelations. This point is however not weakened by the fact that the leper was not dispensed with the

necessity to present himself to the Levitical priests for inspection and official recognition as cleansed, because the Law itself must stand until Jesus took it away by His death on the cross. (Eph. 2:11-16. See notes on Mt. 5:17-20)

But, how could Jesus touch the leper without incurring at least one day's defilement?

1. One possible answer offered by some is that He thus declared Himself an independent Priest, after Melchizedek's order, hence qualified to touch such a leper. This is doubtful, because, His future priesthood was to be heavenly and universal while the Law's prescriptions dealt with this world's problems and the Jews only (Heb. 8:4). Further, the Mosaic system established the Levitical priests as the official health officials; Jesus, the future High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (see Heb. 6:20—7:28), had not been designated such a health official for whom Moses' laws had relevance. Again, Jesus made no such declaration of High Priesthood during His earthly ministry. There is a better reason why Jesus touched the leper without fear of contamination of defilement:
2. He was God and could act without any reference to Old Testament Law if He so choose: as Deity, He was the Author of the Law, hence above it. Evidences supporting this conclusion, which find their only satisfactory explanations in this conclusion, are the following:
 - a. Jesus showed divine authority by taking charge of the Temple, when He cleansed it (Jn. 2:14-22).
 - b. There is no evidence that Jesus ever offered sacrifices for sin or even attended all the feasts required of all Jews. (Dt. 16:16) Rather there is evidence to the contrary which would explain why Jesus would not have offered sin offerings. (See Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15)
 - c. Jesus forgave sins directly, without reference to the Mosaic system (Mt. 9:1-8; Lk. 7:48-50).
 - d. He deliberately announced the change of the central place of worship, a cardinal doctrine of the Mosaic system. (Jn. 4:20-24 contrasted with Dt. 12:1-14; Josh. 22; 2 Kgs. 18:22; 2 Chron. 32:12; Isa. 36:7)
 - e. Jesus set aside the distinction between clean and unclean foods (Mt. 15:11; Mk. 7:19).

- f. For all practical purposes, Jesus drastically altered Mosaic legislation regarding divorce. (contrast Mt. 19:1-9 with Dt. 24:1-4)
- g. Jesus was baptized by God's inspired prophet, not for forgiveness of sins, as John had commanded others, but "to fulfill all righteousness" (see on Mt. 3:15).
- h. He also claimed to be "greater than the Temple" (Mt. 12:6), "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt. 12:8), and declared that there are cases when human needs supercedes the strict observance of the Law (Mt. 12:1-14) His enemies thus understood His claims to superiority to the Law and its institutions and attacked Him at His trials on this basis, ignoring His disregard for their traditions (Mt. 26:61; Mk. 14:58).
- i. The KEY INCIDENT which explains Jesus' unique position as Son of God and, at the same time, Son of Man, is the temple-tax incident (Mt. 17:24-27). God's Son is not bound to pay the temple tax even though Moses commanded it (Ex. 30:13; 38:26).

Thus, here Matthew records an act of Jesus that was, for those trained in Levitical purity, every bit as marvellous as the cleansing itself. But to Jesus, the Son of God come in human flesh, this act was no different than what He had been doing since His incarnation, for His incarnation had already brought Him into intimate, defiling contact with mortal flesh. Some have observed that when Jesus touched and healed and cleansed the leper, that Jesus' purifying touch overweighed the contaminating influence of the leper's uncleanness. Jesus was not defiled, but the leper was cleansed; the two were not left in the leper's former condition—defiled (the situation covered by the Law). Jesus made the leper like Himself—pure, (a situation unimagined by any but God!) How like Jesus to touch this leper! Here is a revelation of His quickness to perceive another's feeling because He loved him. In short, here is the untouchable wrapped around with the love and mercy of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

- 3. Another reason why Jesus may have chosen to touch the leper was to clear any doubt about His willingness to heal. But there is no indication that Jesus touched him to strengthen the man's faith, as some say, because this miracle like many others did not depend upon the faith of the individual healed. (cf.

8:5-13, 28-32; 9:18-25; Lk. 7:11-15) There is no hint of a psychosomatic "cure" here.

Saying, I will. (Greek: *thélo*) This is not the simple future (*ésomai*) meaning "I shall do it," but rather *thélo*, meaning, "I wish (to heal you), I am willing (to do it), I will it!" This expression of Jesus was not merely the naked word or warming touch but also the sheer exercise of His will, which cleansed the leper. **Be clean.** The command of Jesus is perfectly consonant with the previously expressed views on defilement: He did not say, "Be healed," even though this certainly was involved, but rather: "Be cleansed." The marvellous and immediate result: **And straightway his leprosy was cleansed.** Both Mark and Luke note further: **immediately the leprosy left him**, almost as if to answer critical charges that Jesus' "healings" were not obviously and immediately manifest to all, but required time, much prayer and boundless credulity. Instantly the raw sores and dead flesh and insensitive nerves were restored to perfectly normal health. This omnipotent act of Jesus shadows into insignificance all modern attempts at "faith healing," because His was real, immediate and complete.

8:4 **See thou tell no man.** Mark says that He "sternly charged him." This man's former conduct in coming to Jesus in a city to be healed, when the clear implication of the Law was to forbid it, showed that he needed such severe language. But he showed a similar carelessness with Jesus' stern warning. This command probably clarifies the fact that the leper was not cleansed in the presence of the "great multitudes" of 8:1, for such a charge as this could have little meaning, although Jesus sometimes required this of multitudes also (Mt. 12:15, 16).

But this command to silence cannot be urged as proof that Jesus, during His lifetime never claimed to be Messiah, or that He was, for some reason embarrassed by the possibility that His disciples after His death might attribute Messiahship and Deity to Him on the basis of such fabulous stories as the (unreal) cleansing of a leper. His injunctions to silence had quite another basis: He was fully aware of His real Messiahship and time schedule. He did not always forbid such publicity (as in the case of the paralytic, [Mt. 9:2-8 also Jn. 5:1-18]); rather He sometimes commanded it (Mk. 5:18-20). He also empowered Apostles to enter the same miraculous ministry (Mt. 10:7, 8). This seeming inconsistency between Jesus' claims to be Messiah and His forbidding people to say anything about His works which identified Him as such, cannot be offered as basis for rejecting the miracles as not possessing historical reality or for supposing that the prohibitions of

publicity are but hypocritical expressions created by the writers of these narratives. This apparent inconsistency is really a valuable guarantee of the truthfulness of the witness given by the gospel writers. To resolve the supposed contradictions we need but look in each case of an injunction to silence for answers to the following questions: In what part of Palestine was Jesus located when He prohibited such publicity? To what persons did He make such prohibitions? What political background made necessary such precautions, which without them, would have hindered further the progress of Jesus' ministry and schedule?

Galilee and Judea were particularly sensitive to any Messianic uprising. Jesus needed time to teach what kind of Messiah God really intended, before the people could seize Him and use Him and His movement to raise a national liberation front to deliver the nation from the galling yoke of Rome.

See thou tell no man, is sometimes interpreted by some as Jesus' use of reverse psychology whereby he forbade the man to advertise the miracle, thus insuring its greater publicity. It is reasoned that surely Jesus would have foreseen the effect of so wondrous a cleansing upon the emotions of so horribly afflicted a wretch, and could thus have predicted the enthusiastic reaction to his cleansing. Perhaps, it is said, Jesus told him not to tell, so that the man would tell it all the more as a secret too good to be kept. After all, nothing travels as rapidly as a secret!

No, this suggestion is doubtful because:

1. Although reverse psychology is not in itself wrong, the plain import of Jesus' words required obedience to their obvious meaning, unless something in the face or voice of Jesus indicated to the man the opposite meaning, a fact not recorded by any Evangelist. Rather, both Mark and Luke record the man's actions, beginning with the weak adversative *dé*, Luke adding also *mállon*. While *dé* by itself, may introduce a contrast between the clause it introduces and that which goes before it, *mállon dé* introduces an expression or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded. ("instead"). Luke's actual word order is *dé mállon*, which Arndt and Gringrich translate "but to a greater degree, even more than ever." So it is clear that Mark and Luke regarded the result of the man's advertizing as contrasting, not harmonizing, with Jesus' intent.
2. Political popularity of the Messiah concept among the Jews was definitely detrimental to the real success of Jesus' ministry,

and to agitate further an already emotionally charged atmosphere was not at all expedient.

3. Also, the man needed to concentrate on his own obedience to God by carrying out without interruption the prescribed ritual for cleansing. He must not disregard God's commands out of excited gratitude to Jesus.

But, someone might object, was not there a crowd already present when Jesus thus forbade the unwanted publicity? Were a crowd present, would not His injunction to silence be rather meaningless, since, manifestly, the crowd, not being required also to keep silent, would have spread the news? And, is not the exact wording of Luke that "a report about him (or "Him"?) went abroad, so that many crowds gathered . . ." more consonant with the possibility that there were already many present who also told of the cleansing? No, because Mark clearly links the coming of the crowds to the man's actions after he left Jesus. And just because Jesus was in one of the towns does not presuppose the existence of a crowd. Mt. 8:1 probably is not to be connected chronologically with 8:2-4, so again we have no crowd until after the man went away. There is also hurry implied in Mark's expression: "He sent him away at once" (*euthus exebalen*), lest his lingering till excited crowds could gather, further hindering the man's getting away to Jerusalem and impeding Jesus' ministry.

But go show thyself to the priest means: "Go to Jerusalem!" because the seven-day ritual of cleansing and offerings were to take place at the Temple (see Lev. 14:11) and the priest who officiates at the cleansing is the same as he who offers the sacrifices, applies the blood and oil. A whole colony of priests living in Galilee could not pronounce him clean, without that trip to Jerusalem. Jesus, our potential High Priest, superior in every way to Aaron, does not here set aside the man's responsibility to obey the then-valid Levitical prescriptions that applied to him. Jesus, Himself the end of the Law, would not save the man the long walk to Jerusalem for his physical exam.

And offer the gift that Moses commanded. See Lev. 14 for the entire procedure of cleansing. **Offer for thy cleansing.** Though Jesus' Power had taken away all the physical aspects of the leprosy, and thus the leper was "cleansed" physically, yet a leper is legally "unclean" until his physical examination by the priests confirms the fact that the disease has indeed left him. Though a healed leper is considered "clean" prior to his offerings (Lev. 14:7), he is not legally "cleansed" until after his offerings (Lev. 14:20).

Go show yourself to the priest . . . for a testimony to them. Who is "them"? **Them** is plural while **the priest** is singular, so can the testimony to be rendered, refer to the priest at all? Perhaps, since one priest may be a representative of the class of people in Jerusalem hostile to Jesus. It was very important that the priests have the testimony borne to them that this healed leper could bring, because they had not all the opportunities to see all the miracles that crowds in Galilee had. The priests who had only heard of Jesus, or who were hostile and unbelieving, needed to have this conclusive evidence of the reality of Jesus' miracles thrust into their presence. They became thus, to us, another group of witnesses to the reality of this man's cleansing and to the fact that Jesus did not disregard the law (cf. Mt. 5:17, 18). And, certainly, the clean bill of health from the priest in the hands of the former leper would be powerful witness to the Messianic identity of Jesus. There are a multitude of reasons why Jesus should make this peculiar requirement of the man:

1. That the people and priests might see that Jesus did not disregard the Law.
2. To get the official seal upon the validity of the cure by authoritative certification by the priests, thus convincing others of the completeness of the cure, permitting the former leper to re-enter society.
3. To prevent the priests from hearing of the miracle before the man arrived, and from deciding against the reality of the cure out of hostility to Jesus. They could perhaps deny that the man had ever been a leper, or that he had been truly cleansed. Thus their ignorance of the cause of his cleansing would keep them from being prejudiced against a correct appraisal of the leper's true condition.
4. To prevent the multitudes from becoming unduly excited about so great a miracle (cf. Jn. 6:15), when Jesus' primary purpose was to preach, not to heal (Lk. 4:42, 43).
5. To remind the man himself of his responsibility to God's revelation as then given and applied to his case. He might be tempted to think that a man so miraculously cured was not bound by ordinary rules. His mixing with others before being declared clean by competent authorities would serve only to confirm the antagonism of the religious leaders to Jesus.

III. THE LAST RESORT

Did the cleansed leper get to Jerusalem and offer as he had been told or did he disobey this command also, as apparently he did the

other one to tell no one? Mark says: "But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news." All of the justifications in the world that the man could have offered for his actions did not remove the hindrance he thus created for Jesus: **Jesus could no longer openly enter a town** (Mk. 1:45). This was not a question of ability but of strategic impropriety of doing so. Jesus was planning and executing the strategy of His campaign, but the leper created a crisis for Him, by coming to him openly in a city. Jesus sought to settle it by endeavoring to keep the miracle as private as possible, but the disobedient leper interrupted Jesus' plans, caused unwanted excitement, thus closing the door to further activity by Jesus in open cities.

He was out in the country (Mk.), **withdrew to the wilderness** (Lk.) and still the multitudes came to Him from every quarter to hear and be healed! Jesus had to use such withdrawals to the desert places as tactics to thwart the plans of those who sought to take over His movement to use it for their own political ambitions. Jesus' only hope of accomplishing His earthly purpose lay in the careful training of a few hardy believers who were zealous enough to imbibe of His spirit and purposes and carry out His work after the heady excitement caused by His presence had died down. Jesus kept dividing His multitudes in order to conquer them. His popular movement would have been otherwise impossible to control. His constantly shifting headquarters made it difficult for anyone to capitalize on crowd fervor.

It is a distinguishing mark of Jesus' true greatness that, at the height of this popularity, **He withdrew to the wilderness and prayed** (Lk. 5:16). He could have done an excellent job as rabbi at Capernaum alone. He had the masses literally in the palm of His hand, but He recognized how near to being in THEIR hands He was! He deliberately escaped the noisy crowd of well-wishers to slip into the presence of His Father to pray about this crisis.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Is there any necessary (especially temporal) connection between 8:1 and 8:2?
2. What additional information regarding this event do Mark and Luke contribute?
3. Describe the kind of leprosy proscribed by the law of Moses. Tell where the legal descriptions are to be found, what examinations are to be made and, how those definitely diagnosed as lepers were to be regarded by the Israelites.

4. What are the similarities (or differences) between the leprosy described in the Mosaic legislation and modern leprosy?
5. Does the Bible teach that leprosy, as an obvious physical disease, is a symbol or type of sin? Prove your answer.
6. If you deny that leprosy is a type of sin, then, what instruction may be derived from this passage by way of application?
7. In what way(s) is the fact that Jesus touched the leper to be viewed by the then-current Jewish mentality as unthinkable, disgusting or even revolting? Is there any Mosaic legislation against touching a leper? Cite the passage.
8. Why does the Bible speak of "cleansing" of lepers, instead of "healing" them? What, if anything, is the difference?
9. The leper "worshipped" Jesus. Is there anything implied in this word more than simple, natural, oriental obeisance of humility rendered to a respected superior? Prove your answer.
10. Explain the psychological contrast between the original approach that the leper made to Jesus and his later response to Jesus' specific command not to tell anyone but the priests about his healing.
11. What, according to Mark and Luke, was the result of the leper's disobeying Jesus' command to "tell no man"?
12. What do Mark and Luke report as Jesus' reactions to the results of the cleansed leper's spreading the news of his cleansing far and wide?
13. For whom was the leper's offering to be a testimony? And, what was the "testimony" to testify to "them"?
14. Though the nationality of this leper is not stated in the text, as sometimes the nationality is given for other people whom Jesus helped, yet we can confidently affirm that this man was Jewish. What clue in the narration leads us to this conclusion?
15. Is there anything in the account to indicate whether the man advertized his healing *before* or *after* his examination by the priests? (Cf. Mk. 1:45; Lk. 5:15)

Section 13

JESUS HEALS A CENTURION'S SERVANT

(Parallel: Luke 7:1-10)

TEXT: 8:5-13

5. And when he was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,
6. and saying, Lord, my servant lieth in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.
7. And he saith unto him, I will come and heal him.
8. And the centurion answered and said, Lord; I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.
9. For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
10. And when Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
11. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:
12. but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.
13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed in that hour.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is the special significance of this centurion's request of Jesus in light of Roman-Jewish relations?
- b. Why do you suppose the centurion objected, for Jesus' sake, to Jesus' "coming under my roof"?
- c. If Jesus knows all things, why did He "marvel" at the faith of the centurion?
- d. Why was the centurion's faith so outstanding as to be above all the believers of Israel?
- e. What does his faith indicate about the nature of faith as it contrasts with national heritage, blood lines, or family relations?
- f. In what sense are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "in the kingdom"?
- g. Who comes "from the east and west" to be in the kingdom?
- h. Do you think that Jesus found "great faith" among the godly Jews who truly had sought God's kingdom and will?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When Jesus had finished addressing the people in the "Sermon on

the Mount" He descended from the mountain and entered Capernaum. Great crowds followed Him there.

There was a Roman army captain who had a slave whom he valued highly but the servant was ill, in fact at the point of death. When the captain heard about Jesus, he came forward to Jesus in the person of Jewish elders whom he sent, asking Him that He would come and completely cure his slave. When they came to Jesus, they pressed Him earnestly, saying "The captain says, 'Lord, my boy is lying paralyzed at home and racked with pain;' He deserves to have this done for him by you; for he demonstrated his intelligent good will toward our nation. Why, he has even built our synagogue out of his own pocket!"

Jesus said, "I will come and cure him," and with this He went with them. When He was not far from the house the captain sent friends to Jesus with the message: "Sir, do not trouble Yourself: I am not fit to have You come into my house—I did not deem myself worthy even to presume to come to You in person. Just give the order and the boy will be cured. I too know the meaning of authority, being under it myself, with soldiers under me. I order this one to go, and he goes; to another I say, 'Come,' and he comes; and I can say to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this, He admired the captain. Turning to the crowd of followers, He exclaimed, "Believe me, nowhere, not even in Israel, have I met with such faith as this! I'm telling you that many Gentiles shall come from all over the earth to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Messianic kingdom of heaven. But those to whom the kingdom belonged by hereditary descent will be banished to the darkness outside; there men will weep bitter tears of disappointment and grind their teeth in helpless rage and self-reproach."

To the captain Jesus said (through those who had been sent by him), "Go; as you have believed, so let it be done for you!" The servant was healed at that very moment, for when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the boy in perfect health.

SUMMARY

THE RELATIONSHIP AND HARMONY BETWEEN MATTHEW AND LUKE

The Problem: Why is it that two independent testimonies of an event cannot agree on the obvious facts of the case? Matthew was purportedly an eyewitness; Luke received his information through careful research; yet neither tells this story like the other. (Read the two

accounts to appreciate the differences of detail!) Matthew represents the centurion as coming directly to Jesus but includes no mention of Jewish intercession or friends hastily directed to halt Jesus. Luke's narration includes these latter details, but gives the distinct impression that Jesus never saw the centurion.

Several solutions: if it can be demonstrated that there is a possibility to harmonize all known facts, no charge of inconsistency or contradiction can be lodged against the authors.

1. Intentional difference in emphasis even though both authors knew all facts concerned. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 544) notices the following distinctions in the historical emphasis of Matthew, who seems to be addressing himself to Jewish readers primarily, and that of Luke, whose narrative may have been intended for wider readership:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Matthew's "Jewish" Gospel gives the pro-Gentile presentation of the event. b. Matthew sketches the event as Christ's direct, personal dealing with the heathen centurion. c. Matthew quotes Jesus' declaration that offers faithful Gentiles a blessed equality with Israel's future hope, putting aside Israel's merely fleshly claims, dooming unbelieving Jews to certain judgment. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The "Gentile" narrative gives the pro-Jewish presentation of the event. b. Luke narrates Jesus' dealing with the Gentile indirectly by Jewish intervention and on the basis of the centurion's spiritual sympathy with Israel. c. Luke omits this. |
|---|---|

2. In both accounts Jesus deals directly with the centurion, the delegation of Jewish elders and personal friends being essentially irrelevant to the central point: Jesus healed the centurion's slave. That is, Luke presents the fuller, more detailed account, whereas Matthew summarized the account of the centurion's request without specifying his manner of presenting it to Jesus. What a man gets another to do for him he may be said to have done for himself. Thus Matthew's account is to be interpreted as impersonal and indirect, according to Luke. The one

difficulty with this view, obviously, is that, while all of the centurion's speeches reported by Matthew may be merely the quotation of his words by the Jewish elders, what of Jesus' command to the centurion (Mt. 8:13)? If the centurion were not physically present in front of Jesus, how is this command to be interpreted?

It should be noted that the command in Greek is but one word: "Go!" (*hupage*) the verb as well as "you" (*soi*) are both singular, both of which point to one person being addressed.

It might be possible to interpret the last part of Jesus' words ("as you have believed, be it done for you.") as Jesus' answer to be carried back to the centurion by the elders, but what of the command in the singular ("Go thou!")?

3. Another often-offered theory of harmonizing is to view the two Evangelists' narratives as essentially referring to different phases of the total incident. In this case, Luke is regarded as relating the sending of the Jewish elders and later of the centurion's friends and omitting the coming of the centurion to Jesus as He neared his house. Accordingly, it is said, Matthew mentions only the latter event, omitting the others. But this view has two weaknesses:
 - a. This explanation fails to explain how the Jewish elders and friends could have "returned to the house and found the slave well" (Lk. 7:10) unless they went to the house another way and Jesus unexplainedly arrived there first, spoke directly with the centurion and sent him home confident of his slave's healing. The impression conveyed by the text, although not stated, is that the elders accompanied Jesus back to the house, were halted with Jesus not far from the centurion's house by the second group of friends and, after Jesus' healing word, returned to the house with the friends to find the centurion and his slave well and probably rejoicing.
 - b. This explanation fails to explain how Jesus could "marvel" twice, once when the friends reported the centurion's words expressing great understanding of Jesus' authority, and once again when, according to the theory, the centurion himself came out to meet Jesus. Is this psychologically credible? A possible answer might be found in the meanings of the word "marvel:"

(1) When the friends brought the centurion's expression of

great comprehension of Jesus' authority, Jesus was surprised, amazed by his almost incredible faith; hence, Jesus "marveled."

- (2) When according to this theory, the centurion himself expressed his understanding in identical words, Jesus was not surprised, for He had heard these words before from the friends. Now, He *admires* the awe-inspiring understanding of the Roman; hence, Jesus "marveled" a second time.

While these problems may seem to be inconsequential to the common person, yet they are of moment to the critical reader who sees the Gospel of Matthew and Luke for what they are: two independent historical testimonies of actual fact. If they can be changed with faulty or contradictory reporting even in this one event, their record of other events, which all readers would consider of utmost importance, is thereby rendered suspect.

While it is difficult to decide which possible harmonization best expresses all the known facts of the event under study, due to the details omitted by both Evangelists, this difficulty has a positive outcome. Had Matthew or Luke copied from each other or from some "earlier tradition," they could have been more careful to eliminate these apparent difficulties. Because of these difficulties we are driven to the conclusion that each represents an independent testimony, a fact that helps to guarantee the truthfulness of the facts related. It becomes obvious, therefore, that there is one fact left out by both Evangelists, a fact which would solve the apparent dilemma. Each told his own version without including the fact we need to harmonize the accounts. But each told the truth insofar as he wrote. The notes which follow as well as the PARAPHRASE HARMONY precede along the lines suggested in the second possibility for harmony mentioned above.

NOTES

I. THE CARING CHRIST

A. THE CRY OF HUMAN NEED (8:5, 6)

8:5 And when he was entered into Capernaum. Luke (6:17—7:1) identifies the Sermon on the Mount as the event immediately preceding Jesus' return to Capernaum. Jesus had already moved to Capernaum earlier (Jn. 2:12; Mt. 4:13; Mk. 2:1) and apparently shared a house there with His mother and brothers. His sisters, possibly married yet lived at Nazareth. (Mk. 6:1-5) Or else

He lived with families of His Apostles, since many were of Bethsaida (see on 10:1). But Capernaum (of which Bethsaida was but a small suburb) was Jesus' headquarters, "his own city" (Mt. 9:1; Mk. 2:1), even though He could point to no fixed dwelling place (Mt. 8:20).

There came unto him a centurion. If our assumption is correct that the centurion spoke with Jesus only through intermediaries; all that follows, then, is to be interpreted as Jesus' dealing with the centurion via that line of communication. A **centurion** was an army officer roughly equivalent in rank to our captain. These long-service, regular officers were responsible for the discipline of 100 men, a "century". These men were literally the moral fibre of the army, able to command, having character that was unyielding in fight and reliable in peace-time operations. This centurion was possibly the captain of the century stationed in or near Capernaum for the maintenance of law and order on one of the main East-West caravan routes from Egypt to Damascus. A centurion did not necessarily have to be Roman by national origin but must be a Roman citizen (See *ISBE*, 256), inasmuch as Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVII, 8, 3) reports that Herod indeed used foreign troops for the maintenance of order, but of German and Thracian origin over whom were muster-masters and centurions. These were definitely not Romans, as later they went over to the Romans in a strictly Jewish-Roman battle (*Ant.*, XVII, 10, 3).

Study the character of the centurions mentioned in the Bible, remembering that they were men living on the fringe of the knowledge of God (this man; the centurion at the cross, Mt. 27:54; Lk. 23:47; Cornelius, Acts 10; Julius Acts 27).

What sort man is this centurion? His character is seen inductively from his deeds:

- a. He had a more tender heart than was generally found in a mercenary soldier occupying the land of the vanquished, for he occupied himself with generous concern from the welfare of the Jews so often that their leaders could honestly affirm: "He loves our nation." His goodwill had expressed itself intelligently when he paid for the building of the Capernaum synagogue (Lk. 7:4, 5).
- b. He understood the value of human life, be it slave or free. Luke (7:2) informs us this "slave was dear to him."
- c. He possessed a humility that authority had not spoiled and that accomplishments could not puff up. Although he had done much for the Jews that gave him real standing, he said not a word about it.

- d. His courteous discretion puts more brazen believers to shame, for he sent Jewish elders, not presuming to be good enough to present himself before Jesus. (Luke 7:7)
- e. His intelligent faith caught Jesus' eye. He did not even ask Jesus to come to heal the slave; He just lays before Him the story, confident that such great love as Jesus possesses could be reached merely by a knowledge of the facts of the case.
- f. He was a wise administrator, because he had probably passed up the temptation to build something more impressive in Capernaum instead of a synagogue. A theater, hippodrome, or public baths would have been a more impressive expression of his beneficence. However, Plummer (*Luke*, 195) notes that Augustus had recognized the value of synagogues in maintaining order and morality. But the centurion's construction of the synagogue was probably not prompted so much by an interest in good civil order as motivated by a genuine sympathy for the God of Israel, as his later faith seems to indicate.

beseeching him. Although the Evangelists do not inform us with what words the centurion urged Jesus, it is clear that he did not intend for the Lord to come into his house, as his later objections to Jesus' coming demonstrate, unless those objections represent a change of position on his part.

- a. Luke's report (7:3) that the Jewish elders were sent to ask Him to come, may be understood to state what the Jews themselves thought the centurion's commission meant, rather than what he had actually told them to say.
- b. Another possible harmonization of the facts is the suggestion that he sent the elders to call Jesus to come near the centurion's house; then, upon seeing the success of his first messengers, he sent his friends to stop Jesus not far from his house to inform Him that he was an unworthy Gentile for whom but a word from Jesus would suffice.

It is worthy of note that Luke (7:4, 5) describes the elders as "beseeching" Jesus (*parekáloun autòn spoudaios*), Matthew's word (*parakalón*).

How much did this centurion know about Jesus? Jesus' ministry had been concentrated around Capernaum (Jn. 4:46-54; Mt. 4:13-17; Mk. 1:21-34; Mt. 4:23, 24; Mk. 2:1, 2; Lk. 5:17; Mk. 3:7-12). It is hardly likely that the centurion would depend entirely upon hearsay information regarding the cause for greatly aroused public gatherings in an area over which he was personally responsible for maintaining

law and order. Could he afford to ignore this popular Leader in a land tormented by social unrest fomented by self-styled messiahs? Had he, as member of governmental circles, heard of Jesus' healing of the royal officer's son (Jn. 4:34f.)?

Who are these elders of the Jews? They were no strangers to Jesus, since they had already personally observed in their synagogue His demonstrated authority over the demon-world (Mk. 1:21-28; Lk. 4:31-37) and His undeniable right to forgive sins on earth, however blasphemous this seemed to them (Mt. 9:2-8; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26). Is it necessary to assume that these elders were among the habitual critics of Jesus, who, by the unquestionable generosity of the centurion are thereby put in debt to him, and, thus, cannot deny his present request for their intercession? May not these have been sincere Jews, ever friends of truth and righteousness, whether that be found in Judaism, Gentiles or Jesus? It is not necessary to assume that the centurion sent, or could even persuade, all the elders. Their own urging (Lk. 7:4, 5) reflects their real appreciation of this centurion's true spiritual sympathy with Israel as well as their understanding of Jesus' Person and work.

Viewed from a purely Jewish standpoint, the centurion's coming raises a crucial question regarding the nature of Jesus' ministry itself and His relation to the entire Gentile world. Up to this point no Jewish request had been refused by the Nazarene. But is it possible that God be a God of the Jews only? (cf. Ro. 3:29, 30) Is Jesus an exclusively Jewish Messiah? Must Gentiles be barred from the blessings of His reign as somehow unworthy? Whether, at our distance, we can appreciate it or not, Jesus' ministry is facing an immediate crisis:

- a. If He is but a Jewish Messiah from whose Kingdom unworthy Gentiles are barred, then, philosophically speaking, He represents no God Who can be the Father of all men. If there is a segment of mankind for whom Jesus is not the Messiah, even His claims to be an adequate Jewish Messiah are thrown into doubt, for the very prophecies which had taught us to expect a Messiah at all, promised that "he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles . . . in his name will the Gentiles hope." (Mt. 12:15-21 from Isa. 42:1-4)
- b. On the other hand, His hobnobbing with the outcasts of Israel, the pagans who "were without hope and without God in the world," (cf. Eph. 2:11, 12) could not help but occasion the stumbling of many of Israel. It is fine to promise Gentile participation in the Messianic Kingdom in the figurative lan-

guage of the abstract future, but let none actually help any in the concrete present!

8:6 and saying, **Lord.** **Lord**= "Sir," since even with his apparent clear insight into Jesus' unlimited power, it is not necessary to suppose that this centurion clearly comprehended, or believed, Jesus' Deity. This first, person-to-person encounter with Jesus may certainly have led him to conclude Him to be a true Prophet of the true, living God of Israel; but without further revelation he may have gone no further. An understanding of the Deity of Christ comes upon the basis of evidence found in the deeds of Jesus (Jn. 14:11; 5:36). This conclusion may have been dawning upon the Roman. Jesus here furnished him clear evidence that would lead the centurion to grasp Jesus' identity.

My servant lieth in the house. The centurion's choice of words indicates his sensitive taste, **servant**; but Luke states the man's actual social position, *slave* (*doûlos*). Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 307, 308) collects the following ancient world viewpoints:

Aristotle: "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."

Gaius, *Institutes*: "We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over the slave."

Cato, on agriculture: "Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave and whatever else is superfluous."

Peter Chrysologus: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law."

We are aware that some ancients possessed slaves of even greater ability than the master, as, for example, educated Greeks became slaves of the victorious but less cultured Romans. But this does not prepare us for Luke's description: (7:2) "This slave was dear to him." *Dear* (*éntimos*: "honored, respected, esteemed; valuable, precious". Arndt-Gingrich, 268) The centurion's overt anxiety over the slave's recovery may also speak well for the slave's previous conduct by which he had

earlier so devoted himself to the Roman that his thoughtfulness and obedient service merited him this concern.

The servant **lay in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.** Palsy is a synonym for *paralysis* (*UWRE*, 3711; *ISBE*, 2236). The centurion emphasized that the slave is **in the house**, thereby suggesting the patient to be unmoveable, since the sick were frequently brought to Jesus. While the specific disease cannot be catalogued with accuracy, the fact that "he was about to die," (Lk. 7:2), **grievously tormented**, points to the conjectures of spinal meningitis (*ISBE*, 2207), progressive paralysis with respiratory spasms (*ISBE*, 2236) or tetanus.

Observe that the centurion leaves Jesus free to decide what was best to do about the problem, because he believes that whatever Jesus chooses to do, He **CAN DO!**

B. THE CONFIDENCE OF DIVINE POWER (8:7)

8:7 **I will come and heal him.** Jesus volunteers to go immediately to the centurion's house, because this man's faith is sure that the living force of Jesus' word is so irresistible that His physical presence is not necessary to produce its effect (cf. 8:8). On other occasions, as for example, that of the Capernaum royal officer (Jn. 4:46ff) when faith is weak and He is asked to go, He refused in order to strengthen the confidence of the petitioner. But sometimes He went anyway even in the face of weak, faltering faith, as in the case of Jairus (Mt. 9:18-26). This statement of Jesus is loaded with a powerfully confident assumption! Jesus did not say, "I will come to see what I can do for him," but "I will heal him!" This is the quiet voice of dignified authority proceeding about its normal business.

I will come. Did the centurion actually ask the Jewish elders to seek this decision of Jesus, or did the elders, being of weaker faith and less insight, suppose that Jesus' physical presence were essential and therefore put this interpretation into the centurion's words (see Luke 7:3), or did Jesus just decide mercifully to accommodate this needy Gentile in this manner? The key that answers this question is the motive for the centurion's sending friends to halt Jesus not far from the house:

- a. He halted Him there because, to his happy surprise, his earlier mission had achieved more success than he could have hoped, for the wonderful Jewish Teacher is actually coming to his house, but perhaps under a misapprehension as to the nature of the house he is about to enter, i.e. it is that of an "unclean"

Gentile. Thus, he sent his friends to apprise Jesus of this fact. He had expected Jesus to speak a word without coming. What he would not have revealed to Jesus before, he must now confess (8:8).

- b. Or, he expected Jesus all the time, but changed plans when the great reality seizes him that the Teacher is actually about to enter the house. But is he, the careful planner, psychologically caught "off guard"?
- c. He expected Jesus not to say a word at a distance, but to come to the house, stop in front of the house and speak the word. Contrast THIS King's confidence with that of king Jehoram (2 Kg. 5:7). A prophet that knows he is commissioned by God talks this way (2 Kg. 5:8).

II. THE MARVELING MASTER

A. THE COURTESY OF GREAT FAITH (8:8, 9)

8:8 **I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.** This humble objection was brought to Jesus by friends (Lk. 7:6-8). Whether he had expected Jesus to come to his house or not, he feels he must now confess his unfitness, since He is actually coming to enter his house. Either the centurion can now see the group approaching his house, Jesus and the Jewish emissaries in the lead, or else perhaps a runner brought him the joyful word of the success of the elders' intercession and Jesus' coming. Now the centurion, aware of the Jewish viewpoint concerning Gentile houses, must react decisively and rapidly to avert the possibility that Jesus contaminate Himself by contact with Gentiles.

This centurion, alert to Jewish taboos (cf. Acts 10:28) that to associate with a non-Jew, was religiously contaminating, whatever he may have thought of these Pharisaic distinctions, apparently ascribed to Jesus a holiness worth protecting. For this same reason he decided not to approach Jesus personally (Lk. 7:7). He was almost certainly not a proselyte to Judaism (cf. *ISBE*, 2467-2469) for the following reasons:

- a. **I am not worthy** (8:8; Lk. 7:6) *bikanós* = "fit, appropriate, qualified, able, "with connotation of 'worthy'", Arndt-Gingrich, 375.) This language is perfectly consonant with Jewish prohibitions regarding Gentiles (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 546), since a full proselyte would probably consider himself equal to Jews. Luke's expression (7:7) "I did not consider myself worthy to come to you," (*axiós*) also speaks of the centurion's feeling *undeserving the right* to approach Jesus.

- b. Were the centurion somehow Jewish, Jesus' response to his remarkable faith would be inexplicable, since His elevation of Gentile faith above Jewish unbelief would be less relevant in this situation (Mt. 8:10-12).
- c. Plummer (*Luke*, 195) urges that "He loves our nation," could hardly be said of one who was actually a proselyte and would more likely have been said of one in the service of the Herods than that of heathen Rome. However, this has less weight since Josephus (*Ant.* XX, 2, 5) records the remarkable story of a series of benefits brought the Jewish nation by the proselyte king Izates of Adiabene and his mother, Helena.
- d. The more general truth that Jews, even those who were Roman citizens, did not serve in Roman military duty (*ISBE*, 2622) being exempt therefrom, might also corroborate the suggestion that the centurion was in no sense a Jew.

I am not worthy. Though Matthew is a Christian, he records the facts true to life as they occurred: as far as the Jewish elders (Lk. 7:4) and the centurion were concerned, Jesus was a purely Jewish rabbi-prophet. Neither had glimpsed Jesus' universality, for they hoped He would set aside whatever anti-Gentile sentiments He might possess, in order to respond to the centurion's need. Else, why should the elders argue the centurion's worthiness in just those terms used: "He is worthy . . .?"

What a remarkable, practically unique concept of our Lord's qualification and abilities that this centurion possessed! This uncommon confession is the freely offered expression of a representative of the conquering rulers of the vanquished people whose nationality Jesus shared! It is said by a ROMAN officer to an itinerate JEWISH Teacher! This courteous regard for Jesus probably goes beyond the simple discretion of a gentleman. Nobody really believes much in Jesus as Lord until he learns humbly to recognize his own worthlessness and un hypocritically to await Jesus' pleasure. This real man's man is convinced of the great dignity and power of Jesus. This produced in him a counter feeling of equal dimensions of his own unworthiness and inadequacy. This is a normal psychological reaction and a necessary spiritual experience if we are to please God. (cf. Lk. 5:8) Eidersheim (*Life*, I, 549) rightly notices:

But in his self-acknowledged 'unfitness' lay the real 'fitness' of this good soldier for membership with the true Israel; and his deep-felt 'unworthiness' the real 'worthiness' for 'the Kingdom' and its blessings. It was this utter disclaimer of all claim,

outward or inward, which prompted that absoluteness of trust which deemed all things possible with Jesus, and marked the real faith of the true Israel.

In this connection see notes on Mt. 5:3. Compare Lk. 15:21.

But only say the word and my servant shall be healed.

This is supreme confidence in the omnipotence of Jesus: Jesus' Word is to be the instrument by which the healing is to be effected. The centurion's personal experience in the military had taught him the axiom of authority: a real authority needs only a word. (cf. Ps. 33:6-9. Contrast Jn. 4:49; 11:21) His physical presence is not needed to assure the carrying out of his wishes. These words of the centurion, though stated in the imperative mood (*eipè lógo*), must not be interpreted to make him commanding Jesus to use this method or that, for Jesus does not so construe his words. The Lord views these words as expressing the highest comprehension of His power He had ever encountered.

8:9 These expressions offered by the centurion from his own career illustrate but one point: "I understand the principal of *authority*. You have but to give the command and the sickness will leave. If I, an inferior can give orders and they will be unquestionably carried out, how much more can You do so?"

I also am a man (*kai gàr ego ánthropós eimi*). Why did the centurion use the word **man** (*ánthropos*), for it was not strictly necessary in Greek to include this word in the phrase "a (man) under authority." In Luke 7:8 this is made more obvious by the addition of "being set under" (*tassómenos*) a masculine present participle. Is the centurion meaning to suggest, by antithesis, "You are more than a man," i.e., that Jesus were superhuman? The use of "I" *kai gàr ego* is generally emphatic and here antithetic (Dana-Mantey, 123) and suggests that the centurion's antithesis is: "But you are not a man under authority, hence, over all things." The "I also" might also mean "you too," suggesting that the centurion believes Jesus to be "under authority" in a higher sense than that in which the centurion obeys orders of his superiors, for the "also" may merely connect his illustrations with the principle point he is making ("But a word will suffice.") There is a sense in which Jesus was "under authority" (see Jn. 5:19, 30; 14:28; I Co. 15:24-28) and it can be fairly argued that the centurion comprehended by deduction this much of the truth about Jesus.

I say to my servant, Do this and he doeth it. Is this merely a general illustration of the centurion's understanding of author-

ity, or also an unconscious, incidental allusion to the now-suffering servant? If also the latter, then we have a bit larger concept of the slave's personal fidelity which so endeared him to his master.

B. THE JOY OF THE LORD (8:10)

8:10 When Jesus heard, he marvelled. This verse shocks those who, having spent many hours arguing the Deity of Jesus, have lost sight of His true humanity, for, how could Jesus marvel? Does not marvelling include the element of surprise and surprise require the element of previous ignorance? How is it possible for Jesus, who could read the hearts of men as an open book (cf. Jn. 2:25), to be suddenly caught off guard by this sudden display of strong, intelligent faith? The problem may rest in the unproven assumption that Jesus was always omniscient, whereas the obvious meaning intended by Matthew and Luke is that He did not know that the centurion would respond as he did. Jesus had accepted ordinary human limitations, except whereinsofar He needed to act in His character as Deity. Though He possessed supernatural powers He chose not to use them. This means that where ordinary means could not be used to arrive at supernatural knowledge, He used supernatural means, but where ordinary knowledge was needed to carry out His mission and could be obtained by common means, He used them. (Study the following texts as further evidence of Jesus' choice not to know certain things: Mt. 26:40; 24:36; Lk. 2:52; Mk. 11:13; Heb. 5:8)

Our own psychological insight into our own spirit should teach us Jesus' wisdom in choosing to know only what He had come to earth to reveal. There are some things it were better for us not to know, for from a strictly human viewpoint, the joy of surprise would be impossible to the man who knows literally everything. Conversely, all the nightmares of a thousand tomorrows would be no secret to the man who knew everything, and *that* knowledge would be unbearable. Unless we are prepared to be God, Who, knowing the future can do something about its outcome, let us not fret to know a future that God has left out of our ken. Jesus chose in His incarnation not to know some things, in order that His human reaction be genuine, not faked, because of unadmitted knowledge supernaturally acquired.

The question of Jesus' ignorance is, then, a question of extent. If this conclusion is surprising, let us just admit that we have never seen a God-Man before, and we are likely never to see another. Jesus was

unique Son (*monogenes huiós*, Jn. 3:16) and unique God (*monogenes theós* Jn. 1:18). Since none of us have ever tried being God, let us not be too quick to judge what is possible for Him who knows everything, yet chooses to empty Himself of His omniscience and all the rest of those attributes which are His glory (Jn. 1:14; 17:5; Phil. 2:5-11) to be born in human flesh, hemmed in by all the limitations that go with the definition of being human! That is a unique experience that only a God could understand. This may be something of the meaning of Jesus' cry: "No one knows who the Son really is except the Father!" (Mt. 11:27a) So let us just put this fact, that Jesus could marvel, into our understanding of His earthly ministry and accept it. The Apostles who became firm believers and fervent preachers and ready martyrs for Jesus' Deity do not flinch at this suggestion of Jesus' authentic humanity.

It should give us pause to realize that the two factors recorded by the Apostles over which Jesus marvelled are: great faith (Mt. 8:10) and persistent unbelief (Mk. 6:6). Both are intimately linked in Jesus' thought which follows.

I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. Jesus thought it necessary, in order to give adequate expression to His amazement, to cast the centurion's monumental faith against the backdrop of Jewish misgivings about His Messiahship. Vital faith always excited Jesus, probably because it was so rare. This was a moment of great joy for Him. He had been looking for faith, but had not to that moment found any example so noteworthy. Jesus is still looking for faith (Lk. 18:8), for He holds men responsible for what they trust as their real God. This means, obviously, that God does not produce faith in men by some mysterious action of the Holy Spirit without their knowledge and will. For had Jesus produced faith in this centurion, He could not have marvelled at its existence. Further, He could not have blamed the Jews for their unbelief or weakness of faith, because their failure would not be their fault, but His. The centurion's great faith was the result of his apprehension of the evidences Jesus had given men of His identity, plus his personal willingness to act upon what he knew.

No, not in Israel. No more tragic lines have been penned! Where should one expect great faith if not among the heirs of the promises, the chosen nation particularly belonging to God? Yet all Israel had no one, in Jesus' judgment, to match this straightforward, uncomplicated Gentile who trusted Jesus implicitly. Israel had encountered God's mighty acts head-on; their very existence was living

proof of His personal concern. They had every reason to believe God, but were outstripped in actual practice by this faithful foreigner. (See also Mt. 15:21-28). Jesus' joy is tempered by the human tragedy and loss that Israel's failure represented.

Great faith is Jesus' estimate of the man's understanding upon which his faith is founded. Let none suggest that his grasp of Jesus' identity and work is somehow sullied by gross pagan concepts bordering on magic. Not a few commentators suggest he may have even been what later Judaism termed "a proselyte of the Gate," i.e. a Gentile not entirely converted to Judaism by ritual initiation, but still quite sympathetic with Jewish religion and practice. For suggestions how his faith was great, see *Expository Sermon Chapter Eight* over this section.

Study the following texts that reveal that faith is a measurable reality:

Mt. 17:20 The disciples could not cast out a demon "because of their *little faith*" and were culpable because a small amount of real confidence in God could have accomplished relatively greater results.

Lk. 17:5 The apostles requested Jesus, "*Increase our faith!*" as if His stiff requirements required an even superior faith. Instead, Jesus replies again that the smallest amount of real faith would render significant results. What was needed was not more faith, but more humble obedience (Lk. 17:7-10). Faith is a moral phenomenon for which the believer himself is responsible. Jesus evidently did not actually answer the disciples' request as they had stated it, but rather He increased their understanding about what they could expect from God. There is thus a certain point at which God does not need to increase our faith, indeed, cannot, for that is just the point where our own responsibility begins and we must ACT on the faith we possess based on the evidence He has given us all. We grow in faith by doing His will.

Mk. 9:24 The father of the demonized boy recognized the involuntary doubt in his life that questioned even Jesus' ability to help: "*I believe: help thou my unbelief.*"

Mk. 4:40 Jesus rebuked the believing disciples for their fear

Mt. 8:26 during the storm: "Why are you afraid? Have you *no faith?*"

- Lk. 18:8 Jesus seems to despair of finding *any faith* on the earth upon His return.
- Mt. 15:28 Jesus praised the Canaanite woman for her dogged instance that He heal her demonized daughter: "Woman, *great* is your *faith!*"
- Lk. 22:32 Jesus prayed for Peter that his *faith not fail*.
- Mt. 6:30 Jesus attacked worry about food, clothing and shelter as evidence of *little faith*. (also Lk. 12:28).
- Mt. 14:31 Jesus rebuked Peter for being afraid to walk on the water after he had so well begun to do so: "O man of *little faith*, why did you doubt?"
- Mt. 16:8 Jesus rebuked the Twelve because they so quickly forgot the miraculous division of loaves and fishes and were worrying about the fact that they had hardly any bread for the whole group: "O men of *little faith . . .*"

III. THE JUST JUDGE

A. THE HOPE OF FAITHFUL FOREIGNERS (8:11)

8:11 The figure which Jesus used is typically Jewish in language. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 549f) Out of many OT texts the commonest idea of the Messianic rule was the enjoyment, by reassembled Israel, of the joyful banquet at which the patriarchs of renown would be honored guests. (cf. Isa. 2:2; 25:6-9; 45:6; 49:12; 59:19; Zech. 8:20-23; Mal. 1:11. Other NT uses of similar language: Lk. 13:27-29; 14:15f; Mt. 22:1; Rev. 19:9) Edersheim points out that it never crossed the minds of the Jews that any Gentile would ever be permitted to sit down at that feast.

Many shall come from the east and the west. These are Gentiles from out of all nations of the world whose real belief in God exceeded that of the standard Judaism that rejected Jesus. Notice the gentle sensitivity of Jesus as He describes the Gentiles without actually naming them, lest the Jewish bystanders, victims of their own prejudicial views of OT promises regarding the heathen nations, find His choice of words unbearably offensive. (cf. Acts 22:21, 22) Still, the prophets had not been unintelligible in their expression of their expression of God's interest in Gentiles. (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Ro. 15:9-12 where Paul collects some together. NT texts that further indicate Gentile entrance into the Kingdom are: Mt. 12:18-21; 21:43; 22:9; 24:14; 25:32f.; 28:19; Jn. 10:16.) In fact, the whole history of the Church down to the present has vindicated this prophetic word of Jesus, in that the Church has known a Gentile majority almost before the end

of the Apostolic age. What started as a mere trickle (Ac. 10—11:18) has grown into the mighty river of Gentile believers John saw in the Revelation. (Contrast Rev. 7:1-8 with Rev. 7:9f.)

They shall sit down with Abraham: Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom. Jesus is looking at the kingdom as God's reign finally perfected at the end of time when the judgment will have revealed the true relationships that earth's national distinctions tended to obscure. The true sons of the ancient patriarchs are, not those whose only claim is physical descent, but, rather, those who trust God. This truth forms the real basis for Christianity's claim to be truly universal. Note how often this theme permeates Christian teaching: Lk. 19:9; Ro. 2:25-29; 4:11, 12, 16-18; Gal. 3:6-9, 29; 4:29; Eph. 2:11—3-9.

B. THE HOPELESSNESS OF DISBELIEF (8:12)

8:12 **But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth.**

Who are these sons of the kingdom?

- a. "The son of anything" is Hebrew parlance for some characteristic quality or relationship of the person thus described (*ISBE*, 2826; cf. Eph. 2:2). The meaning would be, then, those people, whose main distinguishing feature would be their supposed fitness for entrance into the Kingdom of the Messiah, have suddenly been found very unfit.
- b. If Jesus means the word "sons" in a non-technical sense, the emphasis is upon the legal heirs to the Messianic Kingdom as physical inheritors of Abraham's legacy transmitted through the Messiah. (Ro. 9:4)

In either case, Jesus refers to those descendants of Abraham who rejected the One descendant of Abraham through Whom God intended to bless all nations.

From the Pharisaic standpoint, Jesus is heaping insult upon injury! Not only will Gentiles be welcome guests at the great feast, but the "people of God's own peculiar possession," the Jews as a whole, will be not at all welcome to attend that banquet to which they supposed themselves to have most right. (cf. Mt. 21:33—22:10) The only valid passport to the blessing of God is not membership in a particular nation, family, club or church: it is trust in Jesus, that God wants!

But this biting ironic declaration of Jesus should prove that He was not mere "creature of his time, expounding the highest hopes of contemporary Judaism." Let the unbeliever, who would thus reduce the Lord, explain this fundamental difference between Christ's judgment upon His nation and the thought of His contemporaries. Jesus can

not even be called a mere reformer of current Judaism, for He is hereby smashing its most cherished notions of the privileged place of Israel in the economy of God!

Nor is Jesus merely elevating the Gentiles in importance before God above Israel, for this would controvert the clearest revelations of God's plans for Israel to be the nation through which He would bless all the Gentiles, (cf. Ro. 9-11) Rather, the faith of Gentiles is placed on a par with that of believing Jews. Jesus flatly rejects Israel's merely fleshly claims and obvious, obstinate unbelief. (cf. Mt. 3:7-10; Ro. 9:6ff; 2—4; Jn. 8:37-47) According to Jesus, Gentile faith does not however occupy a position unconnected with or above the true Israel, but rather shares with all Christian Jews the realization of the promises made to the patriarchs on the basis of their faith. (Gal. 3:6-9) This Jewish universalism that admits God-fearing Gentiles is the only true interpretation of Israel's hopes for the messianic Kingdom. (Ac. 10:34-43) This simple sentence pronounced by Jesus must have crashed upon the ears of His audience with the force of an atomic blast. Rather than predict Jewish world domination under the leadership of the Messiah, Jesus describes the fate of unbelieving Israelites: "They will go to hell!"

Outer darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth: this Jesus envisions as the clear alternative to being **in the kingdom**. These vivid metaphors picture in short, rapid strokes a terrifying reality that dares human language to attempt its description, God's final punishment of the wicked. (cf. Mt. 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28) **Outer darkness** calls up three possible visions, all possible:

- a. Banquets, usually being held at night, the invited but unbelieving guests are shut out of the festal gathering to regret their rejection.
- b. Gehenna was spoken of by the Jews as "darkness." (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 550) Accordingly, Jesus' expression becomes a Hebraistic expression for that place of punishment.
- c. Or, perhaps He gives us a picture of a tomb-like dungeon where the imprisoned while away useless hours in total darkness.

Whichever His meaning, the words picture an unbeliever shut out from the light of God and the joy of His fellowship as well as the companionship of the best men of all ages, shut up only to hopelessness and frustrated anger for eternity.

Interestingly, the expression **gnashing of teeth** was not used in OT for "anguish," as one might suppose, but for "anger." (cf. Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Job 16:9; Acts 7:54)

Lenski (*Matthew*, 330) reminds that the phrases "sons of the kingdom" and "shall be thrown out" do not necessarily imply that the Jews were actually in the kingdom, for one can be thrown out when he attempts to enter a place to which he had no right without ever getting into it.

Whether our prejudices will allow us to admit it or not, Jesus has just pronounced God's judgment upon the whole earth. Believers, regardless of their national origins, will enjoy the light and blessings of the Father's house forever; those who refuse to believe Jesus are damned, regardless of previous national privileges or relationships. This revelation of the outcome of God's verdict is valueless unless Jesus knows what He is talking about and has the authority to reveal it!

C. THE POWER OF REAL AUTHORITY (8:13)

8:13 However angered any Jew might have been by the complete controverting of contemporary Jewish beliefs, Jesus vouchsafed the truth of His assertions by the instantaneous cure at long-range of the servant. If the work of Jesus be God's power operating in Him to restore life and health to that centurion's "boy", He shall have no difficulty saving any believer, Jew or Gentile, out of spiritual paralysis and death for eternity! If Jesus' word is effective in accomplishing that which no other man could do, then His judgment of those who accept or reject Him will stand! (cf. Jn. 12:44-50)

Go; as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. Unless we assume that the centurion has come out of the house and is now standing before Jesus, this is a message conveyed back to him by the elders. Luke (7-10) reports that upon their arrival at the house, they confirmed the immediate cure of the slave by the powerful word of Christ.

As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. This phrase on the surface is charged with joy because of the great amount of faith possessed by the centurion. But it also has ominous undertones expressed in its exact logical obverse: to the extent you have not believed, what you have asked will not be done for you." (cf. Jas. 1:5-8; Mk. 9:23; 11:23, 24; Mt. 17:19, 20) Jesus is still talking about the quantity of the centurion's faith: "To the extent you believed I could heal your slave, I shall do it."

However, Arndt-Gingrich (905) describe *as* (*hōs*) as a relative adverb made from the relative pronoun "he who" or "that which" (*hōs*), a fact which speaks of content more than

comparative extent. "Hós and the words that go with it can be the subject or object of a clause." If so, Jesus is saying, "the real content of your faith is what will be done for you, or, may what you have believed be done for you."

Lenski (*Matthew*, 333) warns against a wrong application of this declaration to our own experience of faith:

We should not generalize this word of Jesus so as to make it mean: whatever we believe he will grant us he will grant, or that the degree of our faith insures the gift we desire. A wrong faith may be ever so strong in expecting a wrong gift; Jesus will not meet that faith and expectation, he will first correct it. And often he will do wondrous things where there is no faith present in order to produce faith.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What was a centurion? State their comparative rank and responsibility.
2. Why was one stationed in Capernaum?
3. Describe the apparent character of the four Bible centurions.
4. Explain how this centurion could have both known much about Jesus and thus come to so great faith in Him as to make this plea.
5. Explain in what sense "Jesus marveled at him" is to be understood. Was Jesus in any way surprised by the centurion's great faith and understanding? It there anything wrong with Jesus' being caught off guard by actions of other men?
6. Who is meant by the phrase "many will come from east and west"?
7. What is the feast referred to by the expression "they will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"? Cite the passages that so identify it.
8. What is meant by the phrase "kingdom of heaven" in this context?
9. Who are the "sons of the kingdom who will be thrown into outer darkness"?
10. What is the "outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth"? How is this phrase to be understood? For instance, what if by bad dental care, men do not have teeth any longer?
11. Explain the difference between Matthew's and Luke's accounts wherein the first represents the centurion as coming directly to Jesus with his request, while the second asserts that the centurion never faced Jesus directly but sent Jewish elders and other friends instead.

12. What about the centurion caused the Jewish elders to intercede so willingly to Jesus on his behalf?
13. It is usually assumed that this centurion was probably Roman, but certainly non-Jewish. What are the indications in the text that lead to this assumption?
14. Cite other incidents or texts that indicate that Jesus chose to be particularly unwilling to see the Jewish-Gentile distinction, and helped other Gentiles or praised them, directly or indirectly.
15. State in literal language the meaning of Jesus' metaphor regarding the Messianic feast "in the Kingdom" (v. 11)

Section 14

JESUS HEALS PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW

(Parallels: Mark 1:21-34; Luke 4:31-41)

TEXT: 8:14-17

14. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick of a fever.
15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto him.
16. And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus came to Peter's house? Was this a friendly social visit or something more?
- b. What is Matthew's purpose in the quotation of the prophecy?
- c. How did Peter's mother-in-law "minister" unto Jesus? Why?
- d. Why does Matthew connect these cures of diseases and casting demons out that Jesus is doing with Isaiah's prophecy?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus arose from the seat in the Capernaum synagogue where He had been teaching and left the building and entered the home of Simon Peter and Andrew. Accompanying Him were James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill and had been put to bed with a high fever. At once they told Him about her, seeking His help for her, and so Jesus came and saw her. As He stood beside the pallet on which she lay, He rebuked the fever. Taking her by the hand, He lifted her up, and as He did so the fever left her. At once she rose and began to wait on them.

That same evening, just as the sun was setting, everybody in that neighborhood who had any friends or kinfolk suffering from any sort of disease, brought them to Jesus—even those who were demon-possessed were brought. The whole town was crowded into the narrow street in front of Peter's house.

Jesus laid His hands on every one of them and healed the sick ones but the spirits He cast out with a word. The demons came out of many, screaming, "You are the Son of God!" But He spoke sternly to them and refused them permission to testify what they knew to be true: that He was truly the Christ.

This whole incident resulted in the fulfilment of Isaiah's inspired prediction (53:4), "He took our infirmities on Himself, and bore the burden of our diseases."

NOTES

With this section Matthew describes Jesus' incomparable love for another group of Israel's outcasts. But this time he does not choose those who by the Law are somehow proscribed or actually banned by the rabbis. Rather, he concentrates the reader's attention on God's interest in unknown, humble folk whom the rich, the elite, the higher circles, the religious aristocrats would rather have snubbed as "those provincial nobodies," sometimes sneeringly referred to as "this crowd, who do not know the law" (Jn. 7:49 cf. Lk. 7:29). Matthew now gives the specific examples he had promised earlier (See Notes on Mt. 4:23, 24).

The background and partial explanation of some of the expressions in this section find their origin in the events of the entire day on that "Great Day of Miracles in Capernaum" (study parallel texts, Mk. 1:21ff.; Lk. 4:31ff.). Jesus had returned to Capernaum from the seashore whence He had just called the four fishermen brothers and partners, Peter, Andrew, James and John, to become His close disciples, since Mark's sequence is apparently tighter than that of Luke who

places Jesus' return from Nazareth in that general time-context. With His newly committed disciples, Jesus goes to the regular synagogue meeting on a Sabbath, where His teaching had special impact equal in power to His forcefulness in the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. Mt. 7:28, 29 with Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32) But Jesus was interrupted by a demoniac's raving, whereupon Jesus rebuked the demon, cast him out and freed the man. The onlookers were amazed that Jesus' authority lay not merely in forceful words but also on thrilling deeds. News of this event spread everywhere, a fact which explains what follows the conclusion of the Sabbath rest that day. Immediately Jesus arose, left the synagogue and, with James and John, joined Peter and Andrew as guests in the home of Peter.

8:14 **Jesus was come into Peter's house.** This simple house probably located in Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), apparently also the home of Andrew also (Mk. 1:29) excites our intense curiosity about the lives of the men whom Jesus had just called to close discipleship. If these men are still living in Bethsaida, this fishing village must be so much a suburb of Capernaum as to remain nameless in our text, while Capernaum is the only city named in Mark (1:21, 29) as gathering about the door to Peter's house. (See *ISBE*, 451, 452, article "Bethsaida") However, the town, Bethsaida, remains distinct from Capernaum in Jesus' mind (see Mt. 11:20, 23) and Capernaum's sick might have been brought the short distance to Bethsaida. This strange silence about the passing from one city to another as our text has been interpreted by some as indicating the moving of Peter and Andrew to Capernaum.

Wherever this house was located, its very existence at this point in Peter's discipleship indicates that he did not regard his service to Jesus as requiring the selling of the house, dispersion of his household effects and ascetic life with the Lord. To the contrary, this very house proves Peter's intelligent regard for the central patient of our text, his mother-in-law, (See Notes on 4:18-22) since he maintained this house even in his absence in the service of Jesus.

He saw his wife's mother because the other members of the family told Him of her (Mk. 1:30) and requested His help on her behalf (Lk. 4:38). Does this mean that Peter's mother-in-law were lying in another room out of sight of the company in the front room? Not necessarily, for immediately upon their entering the house the family begins animatedly to describe her attack of fever, urging His help. His mother-in-law's very existence, plus a later reference in Christian history (I Co. 9:5), demonstrates several interesting facts:

1. That Peter, the first so-called Roman pope, was married.
2. That Peter did not necessarily leave his wife to enter Christ's service. She might have even accompanied Peter on some trips with Jesus, inasmuch as other women also followed Jesus and ministered to His needs and those of the group. (See Lk. 8:1-3; Mk. 15:41)
3. That having a wife was no apparent objection to Peter's apostleship, since this incident and Paul's remark certainly follow Peter's call.
4. That Peter's wife accompanied Peter in later journeys, as did the other apostles' wives work alongside their mates.

We know practically nothing about the wife of Peter herself except a notice or two in tradition. But her importance cannot be ignored, as she lends more flesh-and-blood reality to the person of her more illustrious husband. It is too easy emotionally to reject the apostles as somehow a motley collection of effeminate old bachelors quite out of touch with life problems.

Contrary to some opinion, a woman did not really count for very much in almost every society, except the Jewish in the world of that day. (See *ISBE*, article "Woman," 3100). In Judaism the woman's position was high, almost that of the man, although somewhat inferior. (See Edersheim, *Sketches*, Chap. IX) While this healing performed by Jesus is significant for its privacy, having been done in the home of a disciple, it is not necessarily significant in its being done for a woman, for whom the usual Jewish rabbi would have had less concern than for a man. (cf. Jn. 4:9, 27)

lying sick of a fever. Luke (4:38) notices that she had a "high fever" (*puretô megalo*). This may not be merely a thermometer reading but a specific medical term (Arndt-Gingrich, 738), possibly malaria due to the proximity of her home to the Jordan Valley and mosquito-infested marshes. Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 486) notes:

The Talmud gives this disease precisely the same name, . . . 'Burning fever', and prescribes for it a magical remedy, of which the principal part is to tie a knife wholly of iron by a braid of hair to a thornbush, and to repeat on successive days Exod. 3:2, 3, then ver. 4, finally ver. 5, after which the bush is to be cut down, while a certain magical formula is pronounced.

Contrast the then-current Jewish standpoint, then, with Jesus' approach to the problem:

8:15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her.

The other Synoptic Evangelists describe Jesus also as "standing over her, He rebuked the fever" (Lk. 4:39) and "taking her by the hand, He lifted her up" (Mk. 1:31) Jesus used various methods of healing, as did His apostles after Him. (Ac. 3:7; 28:8; Jn. 4:50-52; Mk. 5:41; 9:27; Mt. 9:25) Luke's expression "Jesus *rebuked* the fever" must not be regarded as proof that Jesus shared popular superstitions which held diseases as malevolent personalities in the sufferers, somewhat like demons.

1. Jesus is merely addressing the impersonal fever in the same way He shouted at winds and waves. (8:26)
2. The Gospel writers themselves saw and recorded a clear distinction between sickness or disease and demon-possession.

The fever left her, not weak and exhausted from the illness, as we would expect to see after a recovery finally comes by natural means, after a slow convalescence. *Immediately*, says Luke, she was strong. All three Evangelists unite in emphasizing the intensity of her restored strength, evidenced by her immediately arising to serve Jesus. (Lk. 4:39) This stubborn immediacy is a fact which destroys the naturalistic explanations of this miracle that suggest that the magnetic personality of Jesus, the warmth of His personal touch or perhaps the psychological suggestion of His words caused people to think themselves well, (when really were not), whereby Jesus set in motion perfectly natural psychosomatic laws which later actually cured the sick.

And she arose and ministered unto him. *kai egerthe kai diekonei* Note the change of tense: "She got up and began serving and kept it up." Mark and Luke remember that she served everyone present too. It is not difficult to imagine how she so ministered: what would you do if you had just been a sick woman put to bed with high fever when a houseful of company walks in? Peter's wife was there too possibly, but this remarkable mother-in-law, fully conscious that all of God's power had just been expended in her humble case, has no time for hallelujahs that just bring Jesus more sick people and unwanted publicity. (contrast Mt. 8:1-4 Notes). Rather, being fully aware of the completeness of her cure, being lovingly grateful to Jesus who had miraculously brought her back to immediate vigor and yet, being sensitively aware of His unmentioned but obvious needs, she busied herself in practical service! What a wife Peter must have had, if she were anything like her mother!

In this two-verse vignette Matthew holds up, not Peter's mother-in-law for admiration, but Peter's Lord! In Peter's humble abode where

there was no admiring audience to keep Jesus at His best, Jesus could hear the call of human need and expend all His love, care and power in the service of humble, unknown, unheard-of folk whose only claim to fame was their contact with Jesus of Nazareth. It is this kind of close-up study of Jesus that convinced His disciples they had found the real Messiah: He was the same at home as before the cheering, admiring crowds. He deserved privacy, rest and relaxation as much as any other man, and they know it. Yet He never considered human need a nuisance nor was He too tired to help.

8:16 And when even was come. Matthew gives no reason why these folks should delay their coming until sunset (Mk. 1:32; Lk. 4:40). The two other Evangelists plainly declare the day to have been a Sabbath, a day on which stricter Jews considered bearing burdens to be illegal (cf. Jn. 5:10-18) as well as healing (cf. Lk. 13:14). The day legally ended at sunset (Lev. 23:32). These combined facts not only clear up otherwise obscure questions and render unnecessary ultimately unsatisfactory guessing about the delay, but also point up one of the undersigned coincidences among the Gospel writers that show they are independent. They did not contrive their story.

They brought unto him. Mark and Luke describe the scene as a spontaneous, almost-mass movement that began when the second star in the sky could be seen, which signalled the end of the Sabbath. Since Matthew had not described the demon-experience in the synagogue, in keeping with his simplicity of style, he omits also the size of the crowds, for since he had not mentioned them, he feels no obligation to explain their assemblage. Why was the whole city of Capernaum gathered at Simon's door? All day long since the synagogue service conversations in the homes kept running back to Jesus' power to heal and cast out demons. (Mk. 1:27, 28; Lk. 4:36, 37) Thus, what Matthew reports is all the more psychologically credible, because grounded in the exciting events in the synagogue earlier that day.

Many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word. Again, Mark and Luke are more explicit regarding Jesus' dealings with these sinister beings from the spirit world.

For special studies on DEMONS, EVIL SPIRITS, UNCLEAN SPIRITS, see standard Bible dictionary and encyclopedic articles; especially the Special Study "Notes on Demon Possession" by Seth Wilson, *THE GOSPEL of MARK*, Bible Study Textbook Series, p. 509ff.; Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*.

He healed all that were sick. Note how carefully these supposedly "superstitious," hence, uncritical people of Jesus' generation, especially the Gospel writers, recognized a clear distinction between sicknesses, on the one hand, and demon possession, on the other. Jesus is pictured here by Luke (4:40) as patiently moving through the entire group laying His hands upon each and every one, (*heni hekasto*). Beware Capernaum: multiplied blessings brings multiplied responsibility for the quantity of the Light against which you sin! (See Notes on 11:20-24)

8:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet. For general discussion of Matthew's use of prophecies, see Volume I, pp. 81-86. Matthew's citation of Isaiah 53:4 raises the important question: how does Matthew intend to apply this prophecy to Jesus' work? Does he mean to limit its application to the closing events of this one "great day of miracles in Capernaum," of which he does not actually narrate the exciting events in the synagogue (a fact which might not affect our conclusion)? Yet is it possible that our author should presume to apply so grand a prediction to such limited circumstances?

1. Why not? Matthew may merely be calling up one verse from the entire prophecy to suggest to the Jewish reader's mind, familiar with the Isaianic prophecy, the entire figure of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. Isa. 53:7, as context for this text used by Matthew, applies so fitly to Jesus, who carried more than our human affliction, by bearing away especially its ultimate cause, human sin. (See Jn. 1:29, 36; Heb. 2:14; 1 Pe. 2:24) Even though Matthew himself does not furnish the complete picture, the other Evangelists, who do record the synagogue scene, but not the prophecy, unintentionally provide the necessary pieces that complete the picture:
 - a. God's revelation through Jesus' preaching in the synagogue;
 - b. God's power over the evil spirit-world;
 - c. God's power at the humble hearth of common people;
 - d. God's mercy and help for unlimited varieties of diseased folk.

It might be objected that the most significant part of Isaiah's prophecy, the vicarious suffering and death of Jaweh's Servant, finds no parallel in Matthew's application. But to this objection, two answers are necessary:

- Of course not, because Jesus' death is yet a question for His future revelation to His disciples, even though He had given

veiled hints already. (cf. Jn. 2:13-21) It does not need to be mentioned that His suffering and death itself is yet wholly future.

- Further, Matthew is trying to teach us something in addition to, or something that goes beyond, our accustomed interest in Jesus' Last Week Passion. Levi wants us to see that Jesus' suffering really began with His incarnation and continued through His earthly preaching and healing ministry. His vicarious, sympathetic suffering not only culminated in His death and resurrection, but was His whole merciful life-work as He worked reasonably unhampered by hostile leaders too!
2. Matthew is deliberately understating his case, applying only that portion of the prophecy that is actually appropriate to the situation at hand, but at the same time suggesting to the thoughtful reader to begin to look for more applications of Isaiah's words in the life of this Jesus of Nazareth. For had Jesus significantly fulfilled these words of the prophet, but fallen dismally short of Isaiah's further description of the vicarious death of Jaweh's Servant, He would still be unworthy of further attention, in our search for the REAL Messiah.

Matthew is saying, "If you think, dear reader, that these events I have just mentioned are wonderful for their revelation of a supernatural God at a particular point of time and space in His creation, you must remember the ancient prophecy which prepared our minds to look for just this kind of miracles. While, in the days of Isaiah, the prophecy might have had less force with those who heard him utter these words, for whom the fulfilment were yet future, yet for us, who are living in this day of Jesus' ministry, this confirmation of God's ancient promise through the healings performed by Jesus, actually doubles the force of each miracle. Each sign performed by Jesus is but the echo of Isaiah's voice repeated over again. The ancient prophet's prophetic authority is vindicated in our day as his prediction comes true before our eyes; Jesus' authority is doubly demonstrated both by His wonderful signs, which prove that God is working through Him, as well as by His fulfilment of Isaiah's promise uttered 800 years ago!"

But, as even anyone reading the text can see, Matthew did not say all the above in so many words. This seems, however, to be his emphasis. It would perhaps seem strange to the modern apologist that Matthew should draw no more of a conclusion, adducing arguments

and further proof. Yet, our author merely submits one sentence out of the prophecy introducing it into the middle of two chapters of miracles (Mt. 8, 9, but it is not until Mt. 12 that he returns to similar prophetic applications) to alert the reader not only to the fulfilment of the prophecy involved in those miracles of that one day, but also to similar fulfilment by those miracles which follow.

Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases.

This phrase could have been translated into clearer English by rendering the first word, *autòs*, with a clearer English pronoun:

1. *Unemphatic* personal pronoun: "he", Isaiah's emphasis lying with the enormity of the deeds accomplished by Jaweh's Servant;
2. *Emphatic* personal pronoun: "he himself" Isaiah's emphasis being upon the enormity of the fact that this great, despised Servant actually identified himself so completely with OUR weakness, as actually to bear Himself what we alone deserved.

Autòs is capable of both emphases. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 122) Either emphasis carries the amazed wonderment of an Israel, which bears witness against its former blindness, having seen the actual fulfilment of Isaiah's words in the mediatorial suffering and humiliation endured by Jesus, who, it turns out historically, is the exact counterpart of the prophet's vicariously suffering Servant. Like Job's friends, Israel had thought Jesus to be suffering humiliation and punishment for His own great sins, if His sufferings might be used as the measure for His supposed sinfulness. Matthew's words merely suggest the shock the true Israelite would feel at the discovery that Isaiah's great Bearer took OUR human weaknesses as His own. He personally took upon Himself the whole crushing moral responsibility for the underlying cause for all our sin and sickness.

But, as Delitzsch (*Isa.*, II, 316) points out regarding this text cited by Matthew, "It is not really sin that is spoken of, but the evil which is consequent upon human sin, although not always the direct consequence of the sins of individuals (John 9:3)."

Matthew in citing this text so early in Jesus' ministry, quite out of connection with Jesus' mediation and vicarious bearing our sins in His own body on the cross, shows us that Jesus is already by His own powerful life taking sickness and infirmity away. He remained uncontaminated by personal sins, and presumably never sick a day in His life, but personally assumed and actually removed our burden from beginning to the end of His earthly incarnation.

But is there no sense in which Jesus took **OUR infirmities and bare OUR diseases**, i.e. from us who are Gentile Christians living today? Certainly, a comparatively few miracles in Palestine wrought over a three-year period do not exhaust either the meaning of Isaiah or the purpose of Jesus' identification with us in our sickness and infirmity. This should be clear from the observation that the very few He healed in comparison to the world's ill could again contact further diseases later and, presumably, the fewer still whom He raised from death died again. Matthew's use of this prophecy merely draws our attention to Jesus' perfect command over all human weakness which He can restore to perfect soundness. These few samples are convincing proof that His promises to remake us completely are based in historic fact, predicted by inspired prophecy and guaranteed valid for eternity. (cf. Phil. 3:20, 21; Rev. 21:3, 4; Ro. 8:18-25)

Matthew's deliberate use of a prophecy too big for the examples he cites as its fulfilment draws our attention to the broader general outline of what Jesus was actually doing. Certainly Jesus was working miracles of undoubtedly wonderful dimension, but we must also see beyond them to comprehend the conclusion that Jesus really intended us to draw: "Jesus can make us completely whole in soul and body, because He personally bore away what had destroyed us through disease or sin."

He took and bore our weaknesses and sicknesses. These two verbs (*élaben kai ebàstasen*) also preach Jesus' merciful understanding love for us: He can be touched with a feeling for our weaknesses! (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16) This one line of Gospel has more power in it to support suffering Christians than all the writings of all the philosophers that ever dealt with the problem of pain. To us, Jesus has conquered sickness and transformed our viewpoint regarding it, making it mere "little temporary troubles that illustrate once more that the outward man suffers wear and tear and decays, while their outcome is an eternal glory that far outweighs these shortlived difficulties." (cf. II Cor. 4:16—5:9)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus just been, when He entered Peter's house?
2. What is the importance of where Jesus had been, previous to His coming to Peter's house, with regard to the events that follow?
3. Who was particularly sick in Peter's house? What was the specific symptom mentioned by Luke?
4. Describe the manner in which Jesus healed this sick person.

5. Give the evidence that the person was really healed.
6. State the time when the second series of events, included in this text, began to occur.
7. Explain the reason for the Capernaum citizens' waiting until just that moment to bring the sick to Jesus.
8. State the precise location where the sick were brought for healing.
9. Contrast the manner by which Jesus healed the sick with the manner in which He cast out demons, as seen in this text and its parallels.
10. What was the unusual cry of the demons as Jesus cast them out? By comparison with normal human comprehension of the ministry and Person of Jesus seen in the Jews of that period, what does that cry indicate about the demons?
11. Explain why Jesus would not permit the demons to speak "because they knew He was the Christ." Both Mark and Luke offer this quotation as the reason Jesus silenced the demons. Show how this reason is the proper explanation of Jesus' action.
12. What kind of connection does Matthew indicate between Jesus' activities and the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah?
13. How does Matthew mean the word "fulfil" in this connection indicated in the previous question?

Section 15

JESUS CALLS TO DISCIPLESHIP

(Possible parallel: Luke 9:57-62)

TEXT: 8:18-22

18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.
19. And there came a scribe, and said unto him, Teacher, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.
20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.
21. And another of the disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.
22. But Jesus saith unto him, Follow me; and leave the dead to bury their own dead.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On other occasions when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him He had compassion for them and helped them. Why does He on this occasion try to get away from them? Compare verse 18 with its parallels in Mark 4:35, 36 and Luke 8:22.
- b. Why do you think Jesus tested this scribe who offers to be a disciple? Did not Jesus say that any who came to Him He would not ever cast out?
- c. What did Jesus mean by "the Son of man hath no place to lay his head"? First, what did He mean by it as regards Himself and, then, how was the scribe to understand and apply it? Did He really mean to indicate that one who follows Him should not expect to have a roof over his head? Explain.
- d. Should we try to obey Jesus' order: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead"? How should it apply to us?
- e. When or under what circumstances is someone "turning back" and, thus, "not fit for the kingdom"? (See Paraphrase and Harmony)
- f. Have you ever wondered what kind of impact these blunt replies, Jesus made to these potential disciples, upon the mind, understanding and preparation of the men whom He had called to Apostleship? Certainly, they must have been listening as Jesus said this. How do you think they felt about what He said to each inquiring follower? How would you personally have felt about these high demands, had you been the Apostles?
- g. How would you personally have felt about these high demands, had you been the potential disciple of Jesus? What if it were your religious respectability, your dying father, your dear ones at home, you had to leave for Jesus sake?
- h. What do Jesus' words envision as a future for His self-seeking, glory-grabbing disciples who, clear down to the end of Jesus' ministry, struggled for prestige and priority in Jesus' Messianic Kingdom? (Study Mt. 18:1-5; Lk. 9:46-48; 22:24-27)
- i. Is "was the father of the would-be disciple already dead?" a necessary question to answer before being able to interpret Jesus' command to "leave the dead to bury their dead"?
- j. What is the one clear difference between Jesus and the Church that shows up immediately when someone comes to become a follower of Jesus? How does this difference between us and our Lord affect how we deal with would-be disciples?
- k. Do you think it is possible for us to issue the same challenges of sincerity and commitment that Jesus gave to these men in our

text? If so, how should this be done, in view of our fallibility of judgment, our ignorance of motives, etc.?

- l. What is wrong with a man who finds Jesus' requirements heartless and shocking?
- m. How is it possible for us to become "unfit for the Kingdom of God"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him that day, after He had finished preaching the Great Sermon in Parables (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8), when evening had come He boarded a boat with His disciples. He then gave orders for the departure to the other side of the lake of Galilee.

But before they got under way, a man of letters, a scribe, came up to Jesus and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have their lairs; birds in the sky their roosts but the Son of man has nowhere to call His own."

To another man, Jesus called, "Follow me."

But this disciple said, "Lord, first give me leave to go bury my father."

"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead," was Jesus' answer, "but as for you, you go and preach God's kingdom."

Another volunteered, "I will follow you, Sir; but permit me first to say good-bye to those at home."

But Jesus told him, "No man who regrets his decision, after beginning the life he had chosen, has the right understanding of God's rule."

CONNECTION BETWEEN MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE AND LUKE'S

There might be no connection whatever. Life is just unpredictable enough to make possible the repetition of two totally unconnected series of events so very much alike that anyone not immediately familiar with the connections and relationships, names and places, would almost swear that the two events, as narrated by completely competent eye-witnesses, are but two accounts of the same facts. But the two eye-witnesses, were it possible to recall them from the dead to testify, could verify the difference between the two similar incidents.

The problem before us is the practically verbal similarity between these two accounts, so verbally exact in the Greek text (with but

minor variations) that these authors are accused of copying a third unknown author, of having made personal variations according to their personal style and taste, and of having completely forgotten the original circumstances under which these events actually transpired. Here are some of the facts of the difficulty:

Matthew located this account early in Jesus' ministry quite some time before the feeding of the five thousand. (Mt. 14)

Luke locates this incident later in Jesus' ministry after Peter's confession, the Transfiguration and Sermon on Real Humility (Lk. 9)

Matthew says the first potential disciple was a "scribe", a fact that might be suggestive were the man's motives known. Some attribute to him selfish ambition in relation to Jesus' rising political popularity. But Jesus' answer does not necessitate this.

Luke omits this detail.

Matthew omits this disciple.

Luke adds the challenge Jesus placed before a third potential disciple (Lk. 9:61, 62)

Matthew omits the whole ministry performed by the seventy in Perea.

Luke seems to connect Jesus' response to the first potential disciple with His rejection of a Samaritan village; however this connection is tenuous. Luke points out that the second contact was actually commanded to follow Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom; Luke next mentions the mission of the 70. Does he intend any connection by it?

Plummer (*Luke*, 265) is probably correct in reminding us that, although Luke also lists these three stories together, he too may be editing, bringing them together, not because they all occurred the same day, but may be grouped together because they are similar in content.

Whatever is decided about the contrasting connections between Matthew and Luke, it is very clear that Matthew, as he arranges his own material, is giving some of the finest cases in point to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. Each of these would-be disciples

must decide whether he really wants to be "pure in heart" or not (5:8), whether he is trying to "serve two masters" or not (6:24), whether he is seeking earthly treasure and fulfilling merely secondary duties or whether his first interest is the spiritual joy of God's kingdom regardless of the personal expense, suffering, privations or death for Jesus' sake. (6:25-34; 5:10, 11). The *logical* sequence of Matthew's chapters leads to this observation.

However, if Mark's sequence is the *chronologically* correct one, then, chronologically, this section follows the great sermon in parables. Accordingly, if the scribe approached Jesus at the conclusion of that message, it may be that *that* sermon influenced him instead of anything Matthew includes immediately in this context. (Mk. 4:1-34 recorded by Matthew 13; Compare Mt. 8:18, 19, 23-27 with Mk. 4:33-41)

WHAT IS THIS TEXT DOING HERE?

Would that more preachers of the Gospel ordered their material after the orderly style of this former publican, Matthew-Levi of Alphaeus! As pointed out earlier (Introduction to Chapter Eight), Matthew arranges the miracle stories in groups of three with a line or two recording the response of people to Jesus. This time, however, he puts two responses into the same text and masterfully throws OUR conscience into a crisis. Observe how he brings the two would-be disciples into their own crisis of faith: each must decide what he *really* thinks of Jesus. There may be other clear reasons why neither Matthew nor Luke record the final choices that each disciple finally made. But it seems as if by a deft use of silence these Gospel writers have thus brought into trial our motives for following Jesus. As would a persuasive preacher driving for decision, so Matthew too is not merely telling enjoyable miracle-stories with a happy ending; rather, he is leading the reader psychologically to DECIDE about Jesus. And, to be true to his task, Matthew must insist that we decide about Jesus in a manner that so deeply affects our lives that our whole reason for existence be altered. Many would follow Jesus, but on conditions! If they can remain king of their lives, they will follow Jesus to the end of the earth. But the basic principle behind these compact crises of conscience is this: the Kingdom of God is the rule of God that requires all there is to a man, not all of God that man's rule can require. (See Notes on 5:8; 6:19-34) May we paraphrase Matthew's purpose, if we have correctly inferred it, like this: "Friend, you have seen pictured the Son of God identifying Himself as the rightful

authority to speak for God to you. You have seen His credentials through these miracles just recorded: He cleansed a leper, restored life and power to the centurion's servant, rebuked the fever that had attacked Peter's mother-in-law, and healed all of Capernaum's sick. On the strength of this evidence, are you willing to turn your life over to His direction? Decide! But remember: your reasons for following Him must be pure, unmixed. Your commitment must neither be shallow and hasty nor reluctant and procrastinating. But you **MUST decide!**"

NOTES

8:18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him.

This, Matthew says, is the explanation for Jesus' departure. But why would Jesus deliberately try to get away from popularity at any time in His ministry? Mark (4:35) definitely links this sentence with the conclusion to Jesus' great sermon in parables, and consequently finds its explanation in that situation. (See Notes on Mt. 13) Matthew's connection does not draw as much attention to the popular ministry of Jesus that had already developed, requiring that He keep a tight rein on the mistaken excitement of the crowds who would go to war at the indiscreet mention of the word: "Messiah."

The day is over (Mk. 4:35) and Jesus is worn out after a hard day of preaching, arguments and miracles (cf. Mk. 3:19b-35; Lk. 8:23), this being an entirely different day than that on which Peter's wife's mother and many others were healed at sunset. (cf. Mk. 1:21-34) Hence, Matthew omits the mention of the time as being sundown, lest this different day be confused with that. At the conclusion of that day Jesus had remained in Capernaum overnight and next morning the crowds were ready to mob Him again almost before He hardly had begun to pray in private. This time He intends completely to escape the multitudes entirely.

He gave commandment to depart unto the other side of the Sea of Galilee by boat. (Lk. 8:22; Mt. 8:23) Peter's former fishing boat may well be the one intended, since Zebedee's boat may still be in service as a commercial fishing boat. (See Mk. 1:20) Since Jesus has just finished a day of ministry probably at Capernaum (Mk. 3:19b), His command means to sail east across to the less populous eastern shore for some privacy and rest. The following section concerning the Gadarene demoniacs also confirms His intent.

To some, this deliberate "escape" ordered by Jesus may be surprising, for we would have expected Jesus to continue day in day out mercifully ministering to multitudes of needy people. But Jesus, we

often forget, was every bit a Man who really tired, really hungered, really needed time to get away from the pressures of constant public attention to be alone with His disciples. (See Notes on 4:1-11 and special study on Jesus' Temptations, Vol. I) Not only must Jesus have privacy to teach His disciples and privacy to seek the Father's face, but He must also cool the ignorant zeal of the multitudes. He often used this "tactic of unavailability" to hold them where He could thus control them and keep His own schedule with as few interruptions as possible. (cf. Mk. 1:36-38; Lk. 4:42, 43; 5:15, 16; Jn. 5:13; Mk. 3:9; Mt. 14:22, 23; Jn. 6:15; Mk. 7:24; Mt. 15:39; 16:4; Mk. 9:30) Jesus did not forsake the multitudes because He did not love, but precisely because He DID love them. He knew that their salvation depended upon their understanding His revelation of Himself, but they insisted upon His healing all their sick. This very insistent clamor drowned Jesus' self-revelation to them. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that if Jesus kept healing their bodies, feeding their stomachs with miraculous bread and fish, raised their dead, if He kept serving their material needs, they would miss that very truth which would save their souls! Their attention must not be centered upon the earthly reign of a worldly messiah who can pamper everyone's appetite and keep all men healthy, wealthy and worldly wise but ignorant of the Rule of God! At all costs, Jesus must concentrate their attention upon His real mission to earth.

THE LURE OF THE LEGITIMATE

A. THE LONGING FOR LODGING AND LEISURE (8:19, 20)

8:19 **And there came a scribe.** As at the conclusion of a lecture some of the students crowd around the instructor to ply Him with questions or pursue a question further, so this scribe seeing that Jesus had dismissed the crowds and was immediately preparing to embark for some unknown destination, elbowed his way through the group bustling around him in all directions till he found himself at water's edge where the Lord was just hurrying the last of the Apostles into the boat for the lake crossing.

The scribes, as a class in Jesus' time, had grown from careful students of Mosaic legislation among the priestly class into an honored upper-class occupation of professional lawyers, zealous defenders and teachers of the Law beyond the bounds of the priestly group of earlier days. As experts in OT Law and exposition, application and instruction to the people, they were classed as professional rabbis with nobility.

(See *ISBE*, 2704 and Bible dictionary articles on their origin and position in the nation.)

Heîs grammateûs ("one scribe") is said to be emphatic, practically stating that this is the only scribe that ever followed Jesus, a fact which is undoubted insofar as the record shows. Perhaps so, but *heîs*, "one" is also equivalent to the indefinite article, "a scribe" (Arndt-Gingrich, 230). Or, regarded as equivalent to the indefinite pronoun *tis*, there being no definite articles, *heîs* is the real subject of the participle and *grammateûs* is a noun in apposition with *heîs*: "Now there came a certain man to Him, a scribe, . . ."

These texts indicate Jesus' relations with the scribes: Mt. 22:35; 23:1-36; 15:1-20 (See Notes); Lk. 5:17; 10:25-29; 11:45-52; 14:3; Ac. 5:34) This scribe may already have been a disciple, since the next man Matthew mentions is "another disciple." He is possibly a secret disciple, like Nicodemus, now coming out into open confession of his willingness to follow Jesus. (Note Jn. 12:41-43) But, considering the almost universal condemnation of the scribes as a class by Jesus, and their monolithic rejection of His message and ministry, we may well ask what caused this particular man to flaunt tradition, throw away his friends and brave the censorship of his former colleagues?

1. It may be that this scribe's own inadequate or selfish motives were not yet clear to himself. So Jesus drives straight to his heart's motivations, causing him to examine his real purpose for following.
2. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 79) argues that this scribe seems to have desired to go along with Jesus as a guest, but Jesus gently declines his company since he has no shelter and can not entertain His friends. But does it seem likely that a scribe would be so frivolous as to identify himself with this uncertain, popular movement led by one who so persistently contradicted "the assured results of modern rabbinical thinking," without thus cutting himself off from all that he held dear among the other rabbis as a class?
3. We may be seeing here the sheer impact of Jesus upon the life of this Jewish doctor. This man, thoroughly educated in the method of the rabbis, must have seen in this itinerate rabbi from Nazareth an Authority and excellence that went far above and beyond that of all scribes that he knew about. (cf. Mt. 7:28, 29; Mk. 1:22) Jesus' miracles had identified

Him to THIS scribe at least, as a Teacher come from God (cf. Jn. 3:1, 2) and His message had the ring of true authority in it. This Jewish rabbi, wealthy in the memory of hundreds of OT Scripture texts, heard in the voice of Jesus exactly that kind of doctrine that might be expected from a spiritual Messiah predicted by the prophets. Had he gone this far?

If we reason backwards from Jesus' answer, we shall be better able to see the man as Jesus saw him.

4. Was this scribe unconsciously but clearly compromised by his station in life and preconceptions about the messianic kingdom? And this, even though he be completely sincere, insofar as he is aware of his motives? Perhaps, as Foster suggests, he expected a great earthly messianic kingdom, is now thoroughly convinced that Jesus can bring it about, and now comes forward to assure himself a glorious position and honor when that kingdom becomes reality. And yet, in his own mind, this is the right move to make, consonant with his own understanding.

Teacher I will follow thee withersoever thou goest.

His approach is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that he was himself an accepted teacher among the Jews. **Teacher** speaks of function but, as a word addressing Jesus, does not necessarily mean it was spoken in sarcasm or loaded flattery, as at other times. (See Mt. 22:16, 23, 36) Here is the honest confession of one rabbi who was literally overwhelmed by the supernatural wisdom of this REAL Rabbi to whom he now enthusiastically offers himself as willing follower.

I will follow thee withersoever thou goest. Rereading this sentence, we see in it the perfect expression of that unconditional commitment Jesus really sought from every disciple. And no man can come to Christ until he is ready to make this declaration. And yet, Jesus sees something in this particular disciple that is hidden from many:

1. The danger of momentary enthusiasm. (Mt. 13:20, 21) How would this confession sound when the going got rough, as Jesus tangled more and more bitterly with the scribes?
2. The danger of rash over-confidence: "Without knowing precisely where you plan to go, Jesus, I am prepared to travel that last mile with you!" (Cf. Mt. 26:31-35; Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37)

3. The danger of deep ignorance of the issues involved. This man will probably be shocked to learn the real future of Jesus and His disciples. (cf. Mt. 16:21-28; 17:22, 23; Lk. 9:45)

How would we have reacted to this man's generous offer of his life and influence to our movement, were we Jesus? The man is one of the finest prospects for church membership we have seen in a long time; he has influence, position, learning and, best of all, a willingness to cast in his lot with us in the service of God. The measure of difference however, between our response to him and Jesus' response indicates how little we really understand our mission to bring men to Christ.

8:20 **Jesus saith unto him.** Tired as He was and anxious to get away from people for awhile for various reasons, still Jesus did not treat this excited scribe as a troublesome nuisance interfering with His plans. The Lord may have well known that this scribe had wrestled with his conscience and emotions before, to decide whether to link himself with Jesus at all. Now he rushes up to Jesus at the conclusion of a trying day for Him, right at the very moment after He made the psychological break with the crowd. Having dismissed them, He is busy hurrying the disciples into the boat for immediate departure, when before Him stands a man whose spiritual crisis had reached its zenith, whose eternal salvation was at stake. Besides, this generous enthusiast has bared his heart and life to Jesus. Undoubtedly, Jesus cannot but be moved by this offer. On the other hand, He could not compromise His honesty even to gain this disciple.

The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests: even the simplest animals of God's creation are provided with more or less permanent homes, **but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.** This mercifully homely response shows Jesus baring a secret of His heart to His would-be disciple that He did not talk about with others. However unworthy his real motives might have been, Jesus does not scold him or crush his zeal. Still, in view of so sweeping a proposal, Jesus must challenge the scribe to consider the cost of discipleship. He will have no unrealistic disciples who have never heard what it is they must confront in His service. Jesus did this over and over:

1. To this scribe: "Do you really want to follow me? Listen, it will cost you more than you dream! My service will not be comfortable to say the least, but come along if you think you can take it."

2. To the rich young ruler: (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22, esp. v. 18) "Do you really mean 'Good Teacher'? Only God is good: do you really mean to call me 'God'? Are you then willing to sell all and follow me as God?"
3. To Nicodemus (Jn. 3) "Do you really think I am a teacher come from God? Good, then why argue with me about the possibility of new birth, as if I were but a rabbi on your level? I am not *discussing* this with you, Nicodemus; I am *telling* you!" (Jn. 3:9-12)
4. James and John (Mt. 20:22)
5. An enthusiastic woman (Lk. 11:27, 28)
6. Peter (Lk. 22:31-34)

Why did Jesus cool men's enthusiasm? In order to deepen their understanding.

1. They must count the cost of discipleship; (Lk. 14:25-33)
2. They must learn to live with the fact of Jesus' Lordship; (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:46)
3. Then, having made them fully aware of the sacrifices involved, He would call forth the heroic in them that would drive them to offer seemingly impossible sacrifices for Him.

Jesus HAS to offer blood, sweat and tears to get these excited people to grasp even the smallest conception of where Jesus is going, i.e. to suffering and death. He fully knows how shocking to this scribe would be a full revelation of His future opposition by the scribe's own colleagues, suffering the misunderstanding of His own disciples and horrible mockery of justice and criminal crucifixion that would be His. Rather than destroy this scribe's glimmer of real faith by baring these horrifying facts, Jesus considered it enough to say: **the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.** But what does this mean?

1. Literally, this was not true, because, undoubtedly, Jesus and the Twelve rested somewhere ever night. Further, He would be welcome in hundreds of homes across the country on any night He chose to visit. (cf. the oriental hospitality of Lk. 24:29) Again, He seems to have had a fixed dwelling at Capernaum to which He returned from His evangelistic trips. (cf. Mk. 2:1) Add also the fact that at different times and in different ways, Galilean women contributed to the financial expense of His life and ministry (Lk. 8:1-3). His group also had a treasury with enough money in it to help others and tempting enough to steal from (Jn. 12:4-6; 13:29).

Admittedly, there may have been several occasions when Jesus and His closest followers were probably too many guests in homes every night, and so must have camped out. This leads us to ask: exactly what was Jesus' emphasis and intention for saying this then?

2. Figuratively: Jesus deliberately exaggerated His case for emphasis to impress the scribe with the nagging uncertainty and constantly moving character of Jesus' service. The scribe, accustomed to the comforts of a fine home, needs to realize that, if he would follow Jesus, these must be sacrificed at once. Jesus is saying: "Because of the demands of my unsettled, wandering ministry, I have no time for regular home life."

In this text Jesus is confessing to a poverty equal to the poorest of His day and yet claims allegiance like the most autocratic oriental despot over the tenderest, dearest sentiments of man! Only a Jesus can unite these extremes, for His relative poverty was self-chosen, that none of us may ever despair of His comprehending our sorrows, even though Jesus now reigns at the right hand of the Father that none may presume to believe His Lordship can be lightly dismissed. Every tie that binds us and hinders our service to Him must be crucified! Jesus would have us all see the sinful lure in legitimate things, things that are right, good and often necessary. So He contrasts in this vivid way the sheer uncertainty of His earthly existence with the normal human desire for roots and security.

The Son of man is a title that Jesus used to indicate Himself more than any other that He might have chosen. But where did He find this title and why did He use it, as opposed to better-known expressions of Messiahship? Attention is called to James Stalker's article "Son of Man" (*ISBE*, 2828) which summarizes the answers to these questions:

1. Jesus used this title in full consciousness of His Messiahship, even as Daniel had used it (cfr. Dan. 7:13, 14 with Mt. 24:30; 26:64. See also Rev. 1:7; 14:14. Note Keil, *Daniel*, p. 269-275 on Dan. 7:13, 14)

Keil: "He thereby lays claim at once to . . . a divine pre-existence, as well as to affirm true humanity of His person, and seeks to represent Himself, according to John's expression, as the Logos becoming flesh."

This is most startlingly clear from the form of the oath by which the high priest bound Jesus to commit Himself to say

"if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Mt. 26:63). Not only did Jesus respond in the affirmative, but added the promise that pointed directly to Dan. 7:13: "You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

2. But Jesus did not merely use this title of Messiahship as an overt revelation of His true character, since this title apparently was not commonly used among the Jews for "the Christ," even though they had some understanding thereof. (See Jn. 12:34)

That the Jews did understand the words "the son of man" to be messianic is proved by the nature of their question for clarification of Jesus' cryptic declaration that "the Son of man must be" crucified: "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (Jn. 12:33, 34; see notes of Hendriksen, *John*, Vol. II, p. 203ff)

In this true messianic title lay half-concealed, half-revealed His identity, and as a term, would not expose His ministry, so readily as would other terms, to the excesses of nationalistic messianism, giving Him time, thus, to develop in the minds of His closest followers the true character of the suffering Christ. Since "son of man" was also a title with which both Ezekiel and Daniel are addressed in their prophetic office, Jesus' application of the term to Himself, without clear and obvious christological intent or explanation, might suggest no more to the uninformed listeners than that Jesus was speaking of Himself as belonging to the same prophetic line. Or else, since "son of man" related the bearer of this title most intimately to the human race (cf. Ps. 8:4), the uninformed hearer could well be held at a distance by its use. However, as indicated before, Jesus' intention was ever to indicate His Messiahship almost as eloquently as if He had said, "I am the Christ." Yet He does this without unnecessarily exciting the wrongheaded political ambitions of national messianism.

3. A third suggestion why Jesus should make use of this title rather than so many others by which to characterize Himself, is His identification with the human race. While His title

"Son of God" emphasizes His unique and unshared relationship with the Father, this title, even though messianic and specifically originating in a context that unquestionably establishes His divinity, still speaks of the human form in which His ministry to man took place (See on 9:6; Cfr. Heb. 2:5-18 as commentary on Psa. 8:4-6; Jn. 5:26; Mt. 20:28; Phil. 2:5-8)

But which of these views indicates best what Jesus was saying to this excited scribe? Any one of the choices is fair enough, although the irony involved in thinking that the Messiah of God is so reduced as man as to have no place to call home, is as heart-breaking as it is tremendous!

Before we feel too much pity for Jesus who had no comfortable, permanent home or earth, we must ask ourselves who is really to be pitied: Him who knew how to detach Himself from home so as to be free to prepare Himself and men for God's eternity, or us who are so attached to the loved and known, to home and family that we cannot respond to Jesus' call to service as we ought? So in the long run, Jesus' answer is less cruel because He will not let this scribe be disappointed after rushing in where he did not understand what he would have to suffer. Still Jesus does not refuse the man. He is now left to decide whether he too is free from earthly attachments to follow the Master, in such unhesitating, whole-souled service as he had at first offered. He must decide whether he will cast in his lot with this homeless Rabbi whose Words alone led men home.

B. THE LATENT LAWLESSNESS OF LEAVING THE LORD TO THE LAST
(8:21, 22)

8:21 **Another of the disciples said to him.** This phrase seems to clarify two points: one, that the scribe before him was actually a hidden disciple who was coming out into open commitment to Jesus, and, second, that this follower is already numbered among the openly committed disciples of Jesus. This gives point to Luke's account of this man's call: To another he said, "Follow me." (Lk. 9:59) For what special purpose did Jesus wish this known disciple to enter His special compassionship? This is precisely the same wording used by Jesus to call Matthew to apostleship (Mt. 9:9), the fishermen-Apostles (Mt. 4:19) and Philip (Jn. 1:43). Did Jesus want this man to enter some special service like that of the Apostles? Was he to become one of the evangelists who would later evangelize Perea? (See Lk. 10:1-23) If so, it is not surprising that

Jesus would need considerable manpower to stir up popular interest in His message among the many cities of Perea and Judea where He had not previously labored with the intensity with which He had practically mobilized all Galilee behind Him. Maybe this invitation was but a general mission to which Jesus called this man, as He had so done with others. (See Mt. 10:38; 16:24; 19:21)

Here is the tragedy of the unseized opportunity: **Lord, let me first go and bury my father.** This man's excuse is reasonably valid within itself, so reasonable in fact that any further argument about his refusal seemed to be eliminated. Not only is his reason normally quite justifiable, but beautiful and honorable, if anyone else but Jesus were calling him.

What was the actual condition of the father?

- a. Perfectly well? Then this declaration of the son may be interpreted as an oriental expression of dependence upon the father until the son becomes his own master at his father's death. Nothing is clearer than this fitting exhibition of oriental filial duty. If this is the case, perhaps the young man is bargaining for time.
- b. Sick unto death? Then this plea is to be interpreted as requesting perhaps months of delay before taking up Jesus service.
- c. Actually dead? This again is oriental filial duty to give proper respect to his departed ancestor.

Some might feel that it would make some great difference were we to choose one of these interpretations as against another. But the fault of the request is still present in all three possibilities: "Let me put anything else first, before serving You." Further, Jesus' refusal is applicable to all three situations. This is proof that the actual death of the father makes no difference: following Jesus is our duty higher than duty to family alive or dead!

Why should the young man wish to remain with his old father, instead of following Jesus immediately?

- a. His father was probably an unbeliever in Jesus: a believing father who understands Jesus' ministry would have insisted that the son serve Jesus. Apparently the young man did not wish to be rejected by his family who would misunderstand his higher calling to serve Christ. They would be too blind to understand what he was doing. Probably, he had every intention of entering Christ's service later

when he became master of his own destiny at the death of his father.

- b. The young man himself did not recognize that his reluctant or hesitating request contained a deadly principle, which, if admitted, would prohibit any further effectiveness as a disciple, if not his very discipleship itself: "any other duty may be put first."

8:22 But Jesus said to him, **"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."** Jesus refused his request in the most imperative language. (cf. Jn. 21:19-22) Jesus knew the human heart's desire to procrastinate, to put the hard duties off until later. In the strongest terms, Jesus urges His disciple: "My friend, it is now or never: be mine!"

By the time the man's father's funeral was over Jesus would be gone on more important evangelistic activity and this disciple will have missed his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be the personal colaborer of Jesus of Nazareth! Worse yet, the man, having not taken this one great opportunity might be convinced by his own complacency or by unbelieving relatives not to return to help the Master.

Leave the dead to bury their own dead. This interesting figure used by Jesus has but one point but many applications. Without mentioning the emotionally touchy word "your dead father," Jesus makes the highest demand upon this young man: "let those who are spiritually insensitive to the high call of the kingdom of God take care of those things that might be called the highest duties of human life." There are people enough who have not caught your vision of God's service: let them attend to those affairs which, in comparison with my service, are clearly secondary.

Jesus does not intend for us to neglect normal human responsibilities. (See Notes on 15:1-20; cf. I Tim. 5:8; Eph. 4:28; 6:1-4) Jesus Himself went to the funeral of Lazarus, but He did not require that Mary and Martha leave the tomb to began an evangelistic journey with Him. Of course, it might be objected that, in all the connections Jesus had with the dead, He intended to raise them. But this is not true, for He did not raise John the Baptist. Raising some of the dead people in scattered parts of Palestine was the least often repeated of His miracles, if the few instances we have is any indication.

Note that Jesus does not mention great sins that cause our hearts to be polluted with hatred, malice, jealousy, dishonesty, selfishness, falsity, murder and the like. Rather He raises the standard: He regards only total commitment to Him as righteousness. Any other reason-

able, useful, justifiable, good duty that is used to keep a man from following Jesus is SIN! (Mt. 10:34-38; 16:24-26; Lk. 14:26-33) Jesus does not intend nor does He insist on our denial of some things. Rather, He insists on our total commitment to Him that will sacrifice anything to be free to do His bidding. (See Notes on 5:29, 30) No man, having heard the direct call of Christ to any work and is sure that Jesus means him (and not merely infers that he is meant on the basis of reasoning based upon Jesus' words), has a right to make reservations or limitations on his service. Jesus wants the whole man. Too often we are none of us all of one piece. More than one man dwells within us, often in uncomfortable association with his fellows. We are "walking civil wars." Thus, anyone who commits himself to follow Jesus and delays, temporizes or reminisces about the desirability of the life or relationships he is leaving behind, is not fit for the kingdom. His heart is still tied to the world. (cf. Lk. 17:32) No family tie or social relationship may have any competitive compulsion over a disciple of the Lord. (Mt. 10:36, 37) And yet, tragically, some do go home to discuss their conversion with unbelieving relatives and never return. Jesus demonstrated what He meant by this principle. (Mt. 12:46-50; Jn. 2:4) Did He love Mary and His brothers any less than when He walked out of Nazareth never to return "home" again? That higher ministry, for which He left them behind in Nazareth and refused to let their fleshly relationship hold Him or influence His ministry (cf. Mk. 3:21), revealed a higher, deeper love for them than all the remaining at home and serving them there could have ever shown. Paul too understood Jesus' meaning. (Phil. 3:5-10)

Lk. 9:60 **But as for you . . .** Jesus recognizes in this man a true disciple in spite of his hesitations: "You are not a dead man you are sensitive to the needs of Israel, you have heard the call of God. The ministry to which I have called you is so important and this discipleship so holy that you have as much reason as any high priest to leave the burial of your family to others in order to do your duty to me!" (See Lev. 21:11; Nu. 6:6, 7) The ministry to which I have called you is no less than the proclamation of the kingdom of God!" Foster (*Middle*, 101) points out that, once a man is dead, there is little more that can be done for him, while there are living souls in eternal danger for whom much can be done by urgent preaching. He sees Jesus' words as implying a contrast between the relative unimportance of funerals when compared with the urgency of saving the living.

Why did Jesus give different people different answers? Because they were different people. His admonition depended upon the situation, the circumstances and the person's hearts:

1. To one He says, "Follow me" (Mt. 8:22; Lk. 9:59; Jn. 1:43 etc.)
2. To another He says, "Return home to friends and declare how much God has done for you." (Lk. 8:39)
3. To cleansed lepers: "Go show yourselves to the priests and offer the gifts . . ." (Mt. 8:4; Lk. 17:11-19)
4. To an enthusiastic scribe: "Consider the hardships." (Mt. 8:20)
5. To a rich young ruler: "Sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and come, follow me." (Mt. 19:21)
6. To a compromiser: "I accept no lukewarm service." (Rev. 3:16; Lk. 9:62)

This hard saying of Jesus is perfectly in harmony with the hard terms of discipleship He set before the multitudes. Plummer rightly gives us pause with the question (*Matthew*, 130): "Who is this One who with such quiet assurance makes such claims upon men?" Unless we are willing to answer this question and unflinchingly surrender even the most justifiable, and most useful occupations that hinder obedience to Jesus, we cannot properly call ourselves His disciples!

C. THE LIABILITY AND LOSS OF A LAST, LINGERING LOOK AT THE LOVED AND A LAMENTATION OF WHAT IS LEFT (Lk. 9:61, 62)

Even if the two accounts of Matthew and Luke are not the same, let us study Luke's third man as additional commentary on Jesus' attitude toward shallow commitment. Here is a disciple facing the danger of unfinished commitment. Hear his dallying temporizing: **"I will follow you, Lord, but let me first . . .** It does not really matter what words follow for he has already pronounced those two words that may NEVER be used in the same sentence when addressed to Jesus: "But Lord . . ." If Jesus is LORD, then there can be no but's, if's, and's or maybe's.

Permit me first to say farewell to those at my home.

In contrast to the man just before him, who might have been requesting much time, this disciple assures Jesus of his willingness to take up His service, with the very small request, the very small proviso, that he be permitted to take leave of his loved ones. What could be more reasonable? Is this not a proper respect for those whose society has been our familiar environment and for whom we have

been pleasurable companions? Yet, Jesus sees in this man's plea a mind, a heart that is still on the past, the loved, the dear. He must enjoy them once more before giving them up permanently. He had a "Lot's wife mentality." (cf. Lk. 17:32) Jesus' service was not yet for him his highest joy, nor was Jesus yet dearer than the home folks. We can best understand Jesus' attitude toward this man's weakness by studying contrasting illustrations of men who grasped this truth:

1. Compare Elisha's call to the prophetic ministry (I Kg. 19:19-21)
2. See Paul's attitude toward the relative value of ALL ELSE (Phil. 3:8f.)
3. Contrast Matthew's attitude when he gave a farewell feast. Rather than enjoy the company of his former associates a little longer before making the final break, he apparently intended the occasion to be used to introduce his old cronies to the new Lord of his life. It was obvious to Jesus and to Matthew's friends that he had already, permanently and unequivocally broken his emotional ties with the publican life from which Jesus had called him. (See on Mt. 9:9-13)

" Lk. 9:62 **Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.** This dreadful warning of Jesus—"None who begin my service and look back are FIT!"—must cause us to sense the lofty, imperative character of Christ's call. We must learn to live with the FACT of His Lordship.

Put his hand to the plow, taken as an expression, probably has nothing at all to do with plowing, as if in the act of looking back, the plowman should be thought to fail to plow a straight furrow. Jesus is not discussing plowing at all, but ENTERING INTO DISCIPLESHIP. If Jesus' words in the first part of this conditional clause are considered metaphorical as well as those in the conclusion, why should the intervening words be taken literally? What are we to suppose the plowman to be looking at? It is just better not to regard this admonition as a "parable of the plowman," and, instead, take His words simply in a metaphorical sense. The point Jesus is making, i.e. undivided loyalty and concentrated, committed attention to the tasks of the Kingdom, can be understood from His words without first reducing them to a parable. This is but a proverbial expression meaning: "anyone who begins the task."

And looks back. If you take your allegiance to the Christ as a settled matter, do not die a thousand deaths struggling to decide whether you will do what He wills or not. (Cf. Phil. 3:13; Jn. 6:66, 67; Heb. 10:32-39) The reason Lot's wife was destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah is that her look back revealed that her heart, her life, her love lay with the cities that God had determined to destroy. Her act of looking back unveiled an unwillingness to forsake all for God's sake, not even if her life depended upon it.

This passage is no reference at all to those who, having become Christians, engage in "secular" work for their living, for so-called "secular" work may enable one to publish the gospel much more effectively from a standpoint of financial independence. At the same time, such "secular" work can give power to one's preaching, not only by personal example on the job, but also as proof that "we seek not yours, but you!" (Cf. 2 Co. 12:14)

WHO ARE THESE MEN?

There have been commentators that have sought to identify these men willing to follow Jesus under certain conditions. (See Plummer, *Luke*, 266, for illustrations.) The most notable suggestions are usually Apostles, who, out of deference for their later office, remain anonymous, according to the view of those who search for the identity of these totally unknown men. It is certainly useless to waste time trying to learn what the Bible did not say.

But it is of profound importance to remember that the lives of the apprentice Apostles was not all light and beauty. They struggled with real prejudices. (Cf. Mt. 16:21-23) They wrestled their misinformed consciences while Jesus' requirements and views continued to batter their own cherished notions. Foster (*Middle*, 98) provokes imaginative thought by asking: what kind of impact did Jesus' blunt challenges to these would-be disciples make upon the mind, understanding and preparation of the men whom He had called to Apostleship? They would yet, even until Jesus' last hours, debate their own relative merits for high positions in Jesus' Kingdom. (Cf. Mk. 9:33-37; Lk. 22:24-27) How must the Apostles have understood these hard-line answers Jesus gave these other men? They could not remain unaffected by the shocking treatment Jesus gave the others. (Cf. Mt. 15:12) His words could not but affect their later judgment regarding the relative value of social position, wealth and family.

As for these would-be disciples, we know nothing about what decision they made when their conscience was thrown into crisis.

But we do know and thank God for what the Apostles decided. This is our own conscience faced with the burning question of Jesus' Lordship. How shall we respond?

Jesus is endeavoring to impress, sift and confirm His disciples. He had already arrested their attention by so vividly describing the nature and conditions of His service, that they might be clearly aware of what they would face if they follow Him. These words sift and eliminate some who are too unwilling, or too fearful to undertake His service. These words inspire and confirm the determination of those who, though also frightened, desire service under Jesus above all else. His words stir the hero in their hearts and call him forth.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. State the problems involved in trying to harmonize Matthew's account and the circumstances to which it was related, with that of Luke in the circumstances in which this latter tells us this same basic story.
2. Do you conclude that these are two accounts of the same event or two separate events? Upon what basis do you decide this?
3. If you have not already done so, in answer to the previous questions, state the different circumstances which precede Matthew's account, and then those which Luke states as immediately preceding this event. These must be known, since our understanding of the author's intent for including them will certainly affect how they are to be interpreted. Where was Jesus going just as the scene begins, according to Matthew? According to Luke?
4. According to Matthew, who was the first disciple to approach Jesus requesting permission to accompany Him in His ministry and travels? What is so significant about this man's offer? Describe his social position which makes his offer so unusual.
5. State and interpret Jesus' answer. Was Jesus' answer strictly true? Did Jesus have a home, whenever He was "at home", to return to?
6. Is it known whether the father was dead, for whom one invited disciple desired to delay his service?
7. Who are the "dead" who must be left to "bury their own dead"? Explain Jesus' use of the word "dead" in each case.
8. What does Luke report as Jesus' antithesis of His command to leave the dead to bury their own dead? That is, what does Jesus state as being the direct opposite, in this case, to ministering to one's dying or dead relatives?
9. Did Jesus regard the disciple, whom He ordered to leave the dead

- to bury their own dead, as being "dead" too? How do you know?
10. What is meant by the expression: "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God"? What is this "kingdom of God" that Jesus wanted proclaimed by that disciple? How does that concept differ (if it does) from the kingdom of God realized in the Church today?
 11. What additional situation does Luke record in connection with these challenges Jesus gave others to count the cost of their discipleship to Him?
 12. Was the third man committed to Jesus? If not, why not? If so, in what way?
 13. What did Jesus think was wrong with saying farewell to those at home?
 14. What is meant by Luke's expression: "put one's hand to the plow"?
 15. In Jesus' warning, what does He mean by the expression: "look back"?
 16. Does Jesus mean these expressions literally or figuratively?
 17. In what way is one, who begins service in the Kingdom of God, accepts the responsibility to follow Jesus and then tempts himself to reconsider his decision by evaluating all he is giving up for this service, so particularly unfit for the kingdom of God? What does Jesus mean by the expression: "not fit for the kingdom"?
 18. Is Jesus using the expression "kingdom of God" in this admonition exactly with the same force or meaning as earlier when He charged the other disciple to "go and proclaim the kingdom of God"?
 19. Explain the absolute necessity for Jesus' challenging of the sincerity and commitment of these enthusiastic followers. Show the contrast between the open-arms reception we feel constrained to give any contact who manifests an interest in Christ, and the blunt, almost stand-offish approach actually used by Jesus Himself here.
 20. List other cases where Jesus cooled the enthusiasm of a would-be follower, in order to deepen his understanding and strengthen his commitment.

Section 16

JESUS STILLS A TEMPEST

(Parallels: Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25)

TEXT: 8:23-27

23. And when he was entered into a boat, his disciples followed him.
24. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.
25. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Save, Lord; we perish.
26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.
27. And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you think made Jesus sleep so soundly as to remain unawakened by the tossing of the boat during the tempest?
- b. How did fear of the great tempest prove that the disciples had "little faith"? Explain what is so faithless about fear.
- c. If the boat was "covered with the waves" why did it not sink? In what sense was it "covered"?
- d. What do you think is the answer to the men's question (vs. 27)?
- e. If these men were so faithless as Jesus says, why does He pass over their faithlessness with no more than a rebuke? Why did He not rather punish them?
- f. Have you ever been as frightened as these Apostles, just as scared by your circumstances as they were in theirs? If so, you can understand something of the fear they felt. They certainly had a right to be afraid. But Jesus rebuked them for their fear. Why?
- g. If Jesus were merely tired at the end of a busy day needing rest, why do you think He would dismiss the crowds and rush away in a boat where they could not immediately follow? Would it not have been just as good for Him to dismiss them formally at the conclusion of His work-day, rest the night through there in Capernaum, finding Himself fresh for another full day's work? Does it not appear that Jesus does not wish to be available that next day? If so, how do you account for His strange actions? In deciding upon your answer, you need to look both forward to the events that follow as well as the particular events which immediately preceded this precipitate departure.
- h. If these disciples were completely without faith, as Jesus' rebuke suggests then what does this appeal mean to Him? If they did

not believe that He could do something, why did they even bother to wake Him?

- i. Why were the disciples not as sleepy as Jesus? Had they not also spent the full, busy day with Him? Would they not also be tired? What effect would this possibility have upon their response to the storm?
- j. Put yourself in the place of the disciples during the storm before they awakened Jesus. State clearly the alternatives that lay before these men. Be especially clear in outlining what the disciples could have done besides crying out in such great fear to awaken Jesus. Should they have awakened Jesus?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him that day, about evening He borrowed a boat with His disciples and gave orders for the departure to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. So, leaving the crowd, the disciples took Jesus with them, just as He was, in the boat with them, and set out for the other shore. Now other boats accompanied Him. As they got under way, He dropped off to sleep.

A heavy squall swept down off the Galilean hills down upon the sea (which is itself 682 feet below sea level) causing the wind to rise driving wave after wave into the boat until it was being swamped. They were taking in water and were in grave danger. But Jesus Himself was in the stern still asleep on the cushion. The men came and roused Him, shouting above the wind, "Lord! Master! Save us! We are going to drown! We are sinking! Don't You care?"

Jesus awoke and shouted to them, "What are you afraid of, you men with little faith?" Then He rose to His feet and rebuked the howling wind and raging waves, "Silence! Be quiet!" and the wind dropped and there was dead calm. Again Jesus said to them, "Of what were you afraid? Have you no faith? Where is it now?"

Mixed emotions of fear, awe, and marvelling filled those men, as they kept saying to one another, "Who can this be Who commands even wind and sea, and they obey Him?"

SUMMARY

After a particularly exhausting day of miracles, arguments and preaching Jesus ordered His disciples to take the boat in which He had preached across the lake and away from the crowds. During the voyage Jesus fell into deep sleep. A great storm threatened the life of all out on the sea. Jesus, awakened by the cries of His Apostles, arose

and, with a word, completely removed the storm, restoring perfect calm over the entire scene. The happy surprise mixed with fear expressed by the Apostles, suggested something of their appreciation of the true nature of the Lord.

NOTES

I. STRATEGIC SHIFT OF THE SCENE OF HIS SERVICE (8:23-26)

Matthew said in 8:18: "Now when Jesus saw great crowds around Him, He gave orders to go over to the other side." Mark reports (4:35) "On that day when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." Luke indicates (8:22): "One day He got into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." In order adequately to appreciate this unusual movement by Jesus, one must assemble clearly all the facts that occurred on that day. For these events explain why Jesus would deliberately sail away from obvious popularity. If we may be sure of our chronological connections, Jesus' activities on this busy day of ministry may be summarized as follows:

1. No sooner had Jesus arrived home from His second preaching tour of Galilee (Lk. 8:1-3; Mk. 3:19b-21), than a crowd gathered, interrupting any possibility of eating. His own sought to lock Him up for His own good, since it seemed to them He was going mad.
2. A special committee of scribes from Jerusalem attacked Jesus' miracles attributing His power to Satan (Mt. 12:22-37; Mk. 3:22-30). Although Jesus deftly refuted their charges with unanswerable logic proving Himself to be God's Son by deeds that only God's Spirit in Him could do, yet some of the Rabbis unreasonably demanded a sign from God that would prove His claims (Mt. 12:38-45).
3. In the midst of these attacks and responses, Jesus' mother and brothers try to interfere with His ministry (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21), but Jesus openly refused to let human fleshly ties bind Him, claimed special relationship to God shared by no man and placed discipleship on a higher plane than all fleshly relationships.
4. Leaving the house where the "very large crowds" and committees had Him cornered, He boarded a boat beside the shore so as better to handle the throng. (Mt. 13:1, 2; Mk. 4:1;

Lk. 8:4) Since they could not push out into the water to mob Him, He was able to teach them. But He deliberately taught them for hours without telling them anything except interesting stories that half-revealed, half-hid unpleasant truths they needed to learn. (See Notes on Mt. 13:1-53)

5. Apparently, Jesus dismissed the crowds and returned to the house (Mt. 13:36) where He gave private instruction to His own disciples.
6. Since the crowds did not go away (Mt. 8:18), Jesus did. (See additional notes on Mt. 8:18)

These facts lead to the conclusion that Jesus was not merely departing for awhile to rest, something He could easily have done at Capernaum. Apparently, this strategic shift of the scene of His service is intended to accomplish these three results:

1. He needed to separate His disciples for private instruction from the wildly excited but ignorant crowds who were more interested in having their sick healed and seeing wonders than in understanding His message. His Apostles **MUST** understand that message.
2. He needed to take the pressure of the increasing attacks of the Jerusalem scribes and Pharisees off the Apostles. Even though He Himself can out-argue the fiercest opposition of the religious authorities (cf. Mt. 21, 22), the very existence of this opposition cannot help but effect the emotions and conscience of the Apostles who from childhood had been taught to respect those very elders who now so vehemently oppose their Master. (See Notes on 15:12 and 16:5-12)
3. Looking forward to the later evangelization of the Decapolis area (see note on 8:34b; cf. Mk. 5:20), Jesus could have chosen the particular course He did, in order to make contact with that largely unevangelized population. Through the former demoniac, Jesus would be able to advertize, and thus, to prepare for His Decapolis ministry next year.

The unresolved question remains: if all the above is true, why then did Jesus meekly leave the Decapolis when the Geresenes begged Him to do so? Why did Jesus submit His will to the ignorant fears of a few superstitious townsfolk? Even if He, in divine deference to human weakness, chose to wait for a better opportunity in which to teach them, why did He sail directly back to Capernaum instead of landing further south down the eastern coast of the lake? Several answers are possible:

1. Because of this miracle performed on the sea, the Apostles themselves had much more reason to believe Jesus, against whatever opposition the Jerusalem leaders might offer.
2. Jesus actually accomplished much in Decapolis by sending the freed ex-demoniac through that area telling what God through Jesus had done for him. (Mk. 5:18-20; Lk. 8:38, 39)
3. Perhaps Jesus also knew that His answers had silenced the Pharisees at least temporarily, and that the Jerusalem scribes had left to make their report. (They do not reappear until later in the first six month of the third year. Mt. 15; Mk. 7) When Jesus returned, however, there remained a few Pharisees around to mutter the same old hackneyed argument (Mt. 9:32-34).
4. Also, if He had merely gotten away from Capernaum for some rest after that fatiguing day, He was now rested, accomplished His other purposes for getting away for awhile and can now return to finish His Galilean ministry (Mt. 9:35-38).

Why bother with all these seemingly "unedifying details" out of the records of Jesus' ministry, some might ask. After all, are not Jesus' teachings of much more importance? Granted, and one of Jesus' most important doctrines clarifies the point that we can learn most about a man by studying his deeds, the fruit of his life. (Mt. 7:15-21) If this principle is true about men, how much more significantly is it in reference to Jesus? By His actions He too revealed His viewpoint, His way, hence God's way, of dealing with human problems. To understand Jesus is to have studied how He Himself put His message into practice. He had to work out practical problems. He too must live with the physical weakness of this human flesh. He must plan the tactics of His evangelistic campaign while ministering to people's personal problems.

Jesus had said, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." (Mk. 4:35; Lk. 8:22) In contrast to Galilee, the eastern region across the Sea of Tiberias was much less populously settled, (cf. Mk. 6:31 with Jn. 6:1) although nine of the ten famed Greek independent cities of the Decapolis lay scattered throughout that territory. This command of Jesus to embark can hardly be interpreted, as do some, as Jesus' deliberate leading His disciples into the danger of the storm merely in order to put their faith in Him to the test.

8:23 And when he was entered into a boat. Can this be

Peter and Andrew's fishing boat held in readiness for Jesus' frequent use and trips across the lake? (cf. Mk. 3:9; Lk. 5:2, 3; Mt. 9:1; 13:2; 14:13, 22ss; 15:39; Jn. 21:8 shows that there was always a boat ready and available when Peter just "felt like" going fishing.) It was a boat small enough that it could be propelled by rowing (Mk. 6:48; Jn. 6:19) but large enough for Jesus and the Twelve.

This verse is in perfect agreement with the facts narrated in Mt. 13 which, according to the chronological order of Mark and Luke, preceded this event. Mt. 13:36 clearly indicates that Jesus had left the boat after dismissing the crowds and gone into the house. Now He reenters the boat for a sudden departure. The suddenness is suggested by the following circumstances:

1. **His disciples followed Him.** He led them, getting into the boat first. But were the disciples reluctant to follow Him in a boat trip across that lake without any special provisions for a journey when they had hardly time to eat all day? It would perhaps have been more comfortable for them to have refreshed themselves in Capernaum. Or had perhaps the expert eyes of the Galilean fishermen spotted the weather signs of an imminent tempest? But Matthew is clear that Jesus had commanded this trip (8:18), so perhaps in the rush to leave the crowds, none of the fishermen could get together to discuss how to dissuade Jesus from going out on the lake that night. If they did have any objections, they showed their discipleship by following Him!
2. Mark (4:36a) uses a cryptic phrase: "Leaving the crowd, they took Him with them, **just as He was**, in the boat." The presence of the crowds made it inconvenient to procure the necessities for a boat trip toward sparsely populated country at the end of the day. This probability merely underlines the reality of the uncertainty in Jesus' discipleship as represented to the scribe (8:20)
3. **And other boats were with Him.** (Mk. 4:36b) Why? One boat was usually large enough for Jesus and the Twelve. Who are in those other boats—other followers trying to keep Jesus from going away without them? Are they part of the very crowd Jesus would leave behind on the shore, intent upon following Him? (See note on 8:27) Whatever the answer, the owners and occupants of these boats became witness both of the terror of the storm and the miracle.

His disciples followed Him. This fact is remarkable in light

of the stern challenge of the cost of discipleship to the would-be followers (8:18-22). The prospect of a night out on the lake in nothing but a fishing boat was probably not the idea of comfort for the landsmen among the Apostles. But though they too were to have "no place to lay their head," they sailed, because Jesus had commanded it.

Luke (8:23) inserts here the observation that "as they sailed He fell asleep." As soon as the boat began picking up speed moving through the water, the milling throngs on the shore began to fade into the distance and Jesus could now relax, leaving the handling of the boat to Peter's direction. The gentle motion of the boat was sufficient to entice Jesus' tired body to submit to sleep. Resting on the cushion in the stern, He dropped into deep sleep (Mk. 4:38).

8:24 And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea. Luke says that the storm "came down on the lake," a fact that arises out of the topography of the sea itself and the surrounding mountains. The sea, or better, lake (see note on 4:18), lying already 682 feet below sea level, is surrounded on the east and west by hills some rising as high as 2000 feet above sea level, intersected by plains and gorges. These latter function as funnels concentrating any significant wind movement upon the surface of the lake, whipping the water into waves even six feet high. (ISBE, 1166; Rand McNally, 37, 381) Mark and Luke both use a term (*laílaps*) that perfectly justifies the strongest translation, "whirlwind, hurricane, fierce gust of wind." (Arndt-Gingrich, 463)

Matthew's term *seismòs* is a term used most frequently to denote *earthquakes*, and could even refer to an earthquake under the Sea of Galilee, which lay in the geological fault of the great el Ghor rift. Hot springs and the presence of lava indicating volcanic activity around the lake, plus frequent and sometimes destructive earthquakes, leave open the possibility that such an earthquake occurred out of which tidal waves are born. Yet, Arndt-Gingrich (753) point out that *seismòs* means literally, a *shaking* and can be used for a sea storm with waves caused by high winds (cf. vs. 26f where *ànemoi* is found with *thalàsse* . . .) Both Mark and Luke emphasize the wind (*anémou megàle*).

Luke's sober conclusion (8:23) declares that these men were not merely imagining their peril; their danger was real.

Insomuch that the boat was covered with the waves. The ASV of this passage as does the KJV rendering of Mk. 4:37

gives a particularly bad translation at this point and creates a clear inconsistency with reality: "the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full." If the boat were "full" why did it not sink then? The Greek construction (*hóste* with the present passive infinitives *kalúptesthai* in Mt., *gemízetsthai* in Mk.) does not state either that the boat was already covered or already filled. The construction states only that this tendency was certainly in progress. The infinitives are present infinitives, speaking of the action as in progress, but *not* completed, as suggested by the ASV and KJV in these texts. (cf. ASV on Mk. 4:37.)

Waves towering several feet high as the boat plunges into the trough, makes this description no exaggeration. Depending upon the direction of the wind, undoubtedly the boatsmen among the Apostles would have strained their mightiest to head the boat into the wind, rowing to gain steerageway. This maneuver would help the already heavily loaded boat to resist the pounding of the monstrous waves and keep from capsizing. This orientation, incidentally, would put Jesus, asleep in the stern, farthest from the immediate blast of water as the waves smashed into the bow.

But he was asleep. It is probable that Jesus was not on the stern seat itself, as that would be occupied by the disciple operating the tiller, fighting, along with the others who were rowing, to keep the boat under control. Yet it is difficult to imagine how He could have escaped the cold veil of spray from the surface of the white-caps, or from rain lashing the open boat from above. By this time, the boat was probably rollercoasting, careening more wildly with each wave and taking in more water.

How could Jesus remain asleep as that boat bucked and plunged into the trough, wallowing through each wave, threatening to swamp with each successive minute of tempest? Our Lord was utterly exhausted! The great fatigue, produced by the constant demands of the multitudes, emphasize the reality of Jesus' human nature. Jesus was NO angel, but a sharer in the flesh and blood of the descendents of Abraham! (Heb. 2:14-18) He had preached, healed, argued and mercifully ministered to people all day. This kind of work wears MEN out. Jesus had completely collapsed into that dead sleep that comes to the thoroughly exhausted. Some commentaries affirm without reason that Jesus slept with the deliberate purpose of trying the patience and faith of His men. He had no discernible intention of delaying His help in order merely to bring them into a crisis He could get them out of, merely to show off His glory and power.

If it be objectively true that **they awoke Him**, as all three Evangelist affirm, then He was really asleep, not merely feigning sleep until the right moment. (See comments on 4:1-11 and the special study: "Temptation," which deals more in depth with the human nature of Jesus.)

8:25 And they came to him, and awoke him, saying Save, Lord; we perish. From the completely naturalistic view, these ARE facts relative to a swamping boat in hurricane-force winds. But their cries reveal not only the bare facts of the situation. They lay bare their almost complaining reproach, almost bluntly accusing Jesus of not caring. They must have been very greatly terrified to have permitted themselves to address Jesus like that! These disciples had been watching the storm since its inception, leaving Jesus to rest peacefully, so long as they could handle the situation. But now the danger is increasing much too rapidly. Now, rather than see Jesus' sleeping as typical absolute consciousness of safety however great the storm, these Apostles, not fully aware of Jesus' nature and identity, were tempted to regard Jesus' sleep as typical human weakness and inability to conquer the demands of the human nature, especially in this moment. Jesus was asleep, so they must have thought, because He is just another man after all, hence His sleep betrayed a real indifference to their terror, not because He could not understand their fear, but because He could do nothing about it. "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38) How could anyone spend THAT much time with Jesus and yet ask that exceedingly thoughtless and presumptuous question?

Lk. 8:24 "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Their repeated cries betray their desperation. All three Evangelists use present tense verbs or participles (*légontes, légousin*), indicating the repeated appeals to Jesus to wake up. Was this no time for prayers? Just because Jesus was sleeping, did God sleep also? Did they actually believe that a sleeping Jesus could not save them, but would also Himself drown? Or is their cry "we perish" meant to include only themselves? Did they suppose that Jesus could save Himself and leave them to a watery grave? What a reflection upon His love and merciful care for them! The answer to these questions depends upon the view they held of Jesus expressed in their amazed question: "Who then is this? What sort of man is this?" Did they suppose that the ship could sink "wherein lies the Master of oceans, earth and skies"? However great this gale, the storm has not yet been made than can sink God's Son!

Here is the self-revelation of Jesus' disciples. The true nature of their character, their comprehension of Jesus' message and nature, their faith and their doubts are all exposed by this life-and-death crisis. So long as the going was relatively easy and there had been no peril to life and limb, with only an occasional skirmish with the Pharisees, the discipleship of these men had not been so severely tested nor so closely bared in its weakest form. And yet, however imperfect these followers may be shown to be, they are a comprehensible picture of the nature of the Church; imperfect subjects being perfected. Who were these men? I wonder if we do not read our name written between the lines here.

1. They were loyal men. They had gone with Jesus whatever the cost. Now they come TO JESUS and, however brusquely they awakened Him, lay before HIM their plight. But they were only half-trusting "Save us!" is the voice of faith, but "We perish!" is the cry of doubt. Considering the desperation of their cries and the pity of Jesus' response, what did the disciples really expect of Him when they shook Him awake? It is certain that they did not expect what actually occurred. Is it possible that they possessed an unreasoned, undefined, almost blind, desperate hope that Jesus possessed an unlimited power? Or rather, as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 601) suggests, there existed in them a belief that coexisted, not with disbelief nor even with unbelief, but with the inability to comprehend His full nature. It is certainly true that Jesus' revelation of Himself gradually emerged through what He said and did. Each new, unique piece of evidence declared His identity or, better, filled in the outline of his true personality in the character of the God-Man. The presence of some faith in these terrified disciples is proved by the fact that these expert sailors who had wrestled with Galilean storms before, appeal to Jesus who had never handled boats. How could a former carpenter be of any help when these knew that all their skill had found a crisis completely beyond their poor, frail powers? Their half-believing, half-fearful appeal is not directed only to the human Jesus, but has some reference to His divine ability, even if the men themselves are very ignorant of His identity.
2. They were afraid. Why? Because of the human habit of depending completely on their own means and solving their problems by their own wits alone. They had tried to battle that storm by themselves and were not depending upon Him.

Now they HAD no other alternative! He had been merely their last resort, their escape hatch, their emergency exit. Though He wanted to be their constant companion, sharing and helping with their problems and fears by giving them answers, inward peace and calm, they had kept Him on the fringe of their lives, holding Him in reserve until they had tried all else.

3. They were doubters. How simple it would have been to crawl over to Jesus, arouse Him and in perfect confidence say: "Lord, this storm has gotten beyond our small powers to cope with it. But you, who possess all power over sickness and disease, you can do something about this tempest too."

II. THE SOVEREIGN STILLS THE SAVAGE STORM, SHOWING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STEADFASTNESS UNDER STRESS

(8:26)

8:26 **And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?** Both Mark and Luke record a rebuke after the calming of the storm, while Matthew places this reproof before that fact. It is more than likely that Jesus said it both times: before, to draw their attention to what He was immediately about to do; and then after, to show them the moral implications of their fear. It would seem, therefore, that we have before us a marvellous example of absolute serenity and composure in the face of what threatens to destroy everything. Before moving a muscle to deal with the storm, Jesus dealt first with the panic of His men. **Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea.** Then (*tôte*) seems almost emphatic in revealing the deliberateness with which Jesus acted. Anyone else could have objected: "But Lord, this is no time for sermons! Please, do something about this storm!"

Why are ye fearful, o ye of little faith? Whatever the tone of Jesus' voice or the look in His eyes, these words clearly constitute a rebuke. His rebuke is full of:

1. Absolute assurance that in matters that are really important, even this Force 9 or 10 gale was nothing! If there is a God in heaven whose word cannot fail, even death in the waves may be calmly awaited or else His immediate aid may be humbly asked and confidently expected. Here is the courage of faith: these men should have kept their fear under control with an unshaken confidence in God that keeps them doing their best to keep the boat rightside up, when there is every

good human reason to panic. Jesus' clearheaded indifference to circumstances, that had torn these lesser men's reason and faith from the moorings, could not help but begin to restore order in their hearts. He deliberately let the storm rage on, while He rebuked their faithlessness.

2. Loving pity, because in crisis these HIS men had failed. They were the men who one day would unflinchingly face trials, harrassment, persecution, and death. And Jesus would not then be physically "in the same boat with them." Here, however, their growth in faith is insufficient to pass the trial by storm.
3. Sovereignty over their souls. No rabbi could have demanded such unwavering trust as did the Lord. Any religious teacher could have rebuked his students for failing to trust God, but Jesus responds to His disciples' rebuke for His seeming indifference and inability by scolding them for their failure to trust HIM! This rebuke finds its fullest expression when Jesus did what no rabbi would have dreamed of attempting: the stilling of the storm. Thus, He showed in what sense He intended His rebuke, repeated also after the storm, to drive the point home.

It is obvious that the purpose of Jesus' question was to cause these men to see for themselves the seriousness of their moral stature, but why ask THIS question? Fear is God's blessing created into man's nature to trigger his instinct for self-protection. Otherwise, total fearlessness breeds that imprudence that lays the unsuspecting open to all that can harm. Why, then, are the disciples so wrong to fear? It was not that they had no faith at all, for they did have a "little faith". Nor was it that they should not have feared at all, else they would have been psychologically untrue to the nature God gave them. Nor was this rebuke given for seeking Jesus' help. Why did Jesus say it then?

1. Trench (*Miracles*, 90) cites Mk. 4:40 thus: "Why are you so fearful?" According to a number of Greek readings, so (*houtos*) belongs in the text here. (See *Synopsis*, 120) This suggests that their culpability lay in the excess of terror displayed. Fear was important to their self-preservation, but it should have prompted them to pray for God's preservation, rather than cause them to forget His care. Fear is proper, but it must never be allowed to destroy the rationality of genuine confidence in God's goodness. (Study Isa. 26:3; 43:2; Psa. 46:1-3)

2. Lenski (*Matthew*, 347) reduced this question of Jesus to an exclamation "How frightened you are!" based on the use of the Greek *tì* as a translation for the Aramaic *mah*, "how." Just as Jesus had marvelled, exclaiming the greatness of the centurion's faith (Mt. 8:10 comments), now His exclamation implies that He had the right to expect more faith and understanding of His own disciples. Accordingly, Jesus is marvelling at their failure to grasp His true nature. (cf. Lk. 2:49)
3. They were much too afraid to die in Christ's company and service. As long as HE is safe, so are His followers! All who sail with Jesus are safe, regardless of the greatness of any tempest that may come!

The further rebukes of Jesus after the storm, as recorded by Mark and Luke give a bit more insight into Jesus' meaning:

4. "Why are you so afraid? Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40)
This suggests that Jesus, while admitting that these disciples possessed some faith, is deciding that they were not yet arrived at that point in their discipleship where they should have been able to arise in unshakeable trust in God to meet the challenge to their very lives.
The translation "not yet" is justified from the reading followed by Aland, (*Greek NT*, 137) who selects this reading with reasonable certainty. (*oupo* against *pòs ouk*)

"Where is your faith?" (Lk. 8:25) challenges these men to discern the true character of their discipleship, if under these circumstances, their confidence in Jesus and dependence upon Him had been so easily forgotten.

5. It might just even be that the disciples HAD prayed to God, but their continued terror betrayed a lack of confidence in the result of their prayers. Worse yet, they fear that their prayer is useless. Where is the faith of Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Elijah and countless others who faced death in the service of the invisible God? These disciples had not only the undoubted history of God's great deliverances of those men of faith, from which to profit, but they had lived and walked personally with Jesus. Even if they yet saw in Him no more than a great prophet, their failure to trust God is nonetheless to be rebuked, if not outright condemned. (Psa. 107:23-32; see comments on Mt. 6:19-34 esp. 6:30b)

Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. His words of rebuke: "Peace! Be still!" (Mk. 4:39) One act alone was worth an encyclopaedia full of philosophical discussion regarding Jesus' sovereignty over the sea and men's souls. One magnificent proof immediately cleared all doubts. And to produce this great wonder, Jesus' word alone was enough. He needed no special instruments through which His power was exerted to effect the stupendous result. (cf. Ex. 14:16, 21; 2 Kg. 2:14; 4:29-37)

Rebuke the winds and sea: is this simple personification of these natural elements in order to emphasize Jesus' full control over them, as if they were but domestic animals before their Master and Owner?

And there was a great calm. This calm is defined by Mark and Luke by the specific notice: "the wind ceased and the raging waves ceased." A multitude of experiences has taught one to expect a sudden drop of the wind on Lake Tiberias, but this would not immediately calm the rolling sea. Yet, contrary to nature, these eye-witnesses testify to the immediacy of the miracle as a direct result of Jesus' words. Their evidences:

1. The *sea* obeyed Jesus; it did not keep rolling after the wind died.
2. The verbs used by the witnesses are aorist, i.e. not specifically defining the time of the action involved (Mt.: *egéneto galéne*; Lk.: *epaisanto*), whereas if the writers intended to convey the impression that the sea gradually calmed in a natural way, they would have been expected to have used the imperfect tense. This latter tense would have expressed the continuity of the dying down. As the text stands, the wind and the sea ceased their raging at Jesus' word.
3. The impression upon these men well acquainted with the ways of the sea is totally inexplicable, were there no miracle. Yet they were convinced by what they saw that this was indeed a supernatural act of God. The incontrovertible reality of their experience was too obvious to allow these disciples the sort of naturalistic rationalization indulged in by professors of theological or philosophical faculties who spin fine theories miles and centuries from the facts actually seen by the apostles.
4. The rebuke for faithlessness seriously reflects upon the supposed inventors of this fiction, if there were indeed no real miracle. Were there no immediate sign which took place at Jesus' word, He could not have possibly rebuked their failure to

imagine what staggers the imagination! Further, as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 604) suggests, the narrative very markedly expresses that the apostles certainly did not expect Jesus to react to the storm in the way He did. This is a fact, incidentally, which proves also that there was nothing in the popular messianic expectations nor apparently in rabbinic thought to supply a parallel idea out of which some unknown Christian author could have created the legend out of which this "story" is supposed to have come. (See Edersheim, in *loc.*)

5. The witnesses say that Jesus addressed the natural elements, commanding them to be still. Jesus' integrity is brought into question by this fact: either He is a madman or an imposter, if He said what these men testify: "Peace! Be still!" and if He could not compel the wind and waves to submit to His will. A truly honest, self-effacing Jesus would also have had to correct the false impression created in the minds of His disciples, for their leading questions in response to whatever happened (if there were no miracle) definitely place Him on a par with divinity. If the Evangelist have falsified the record by declaring that Jesus actually spoke words He never intended, then we have no basis for certain knowledge about this event at all.
6. The unusual but perfectly credible question: "what manner of man is this?", given as the conclusion to this section by all these Evangelists, further evidences the trustworthiness of the narrative. Inventors of gospel fiction would have been tempted to conclude the record with an extended argument or at least with a stated conclusion regarding the deity of Christ, something to the effect of: "by which, we have now demonstrated the supernaturalness of Jesus."
7. Another evidence of the accuracy of the facts narrated in this section is the general representation of Jesus. All three Gospel writers picture Jesus, whom all apostolic testimony declared to have been "in the form of God", as surrendering to the pangs of hunger, and the demands of exhaustion upon His human body. Now, as Edersheim argues (*Life*, I, 600), if the Apostles had set about to devise this fiction to exhibit Jesus' supernatural power by ascribing to Him power to calm the tempest with a single word, how is it that they do not sense the glaring contradiction between this conclusion and the circumstances with which they introduce the situation? There Jesus is

imagined as exhausted and asleep because of His great fatigue. Edersheim concludes:

Each of these elements: (Jesus' humanity and His divinity) by themselves, but not the two in their combination, would be as legends are written. Their coincidence is due to the incidence of truth. Indeed, it is characteristic of the History of the Christ, and all the more evidential that it is so evidently undesignated in the structure of the narrative, that every deepest manifestation of His Humanity is immediately attended by the highest display of His Divinity, and each special display of His Divine Power followed by some marks of His true Humanity. Assuredly, no narrative could be more consistent with the fundamental assumption that He is the God-Man.

III. THE SEAMEN SEEM TO SENSE THE SECRET OF HIS SUPERNATURAL SUPREMACY (8:27)

8:27 And the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him? Mk. 4:41: "They were filled with awe." Lk. 8:25: "And they were afraid and marvelled . . ." This evident surprise of the Apostles is evidence of their inadequate comprehension of Jesus and His powers, for had they comprehended the towering stature of His divine nature, they could not have been surprised at anything He did. So, there is nothing at all incredible about this question.

Study the disciples' growth of faith from the question posed in the Capernaum synagogue: "What is this?" (Mk. 1:27; Lk. 4:36), to this question: "What sort of man is this? . . . Who then is this?", to their later affirmation: "Truly you are the Son of God." (Mt. 14:33). We grow so accustomed to inspired Apostles who inerrantly proclaimed Christ's message, that we can easily forget that these same men had been exactly what the word "disciple" implies: "learners who can make mistakes before their ignorance and prejudice begins to diminish before the advances of knowledge and comprehension of their Master's message."

The men. Why does Matthew use this expression instead of "the disciples" or perhaps "the apostles"? Is he intending thereby to intimate the distance between these awed witnesses of the miracle and the supernatural Jesus who effected it? The sensation of the awesome presence of God in their midst begins to settle down over these

men. (cf. Lk. 5:8) They had witnessed great and marvellous cures and miracles before, but this was a supernatural event in their own element. It touched them personally. Another difference that marked this miracle is its display of Jesus' supremacy over nature in so large a degree. And even though objectively it requires no more power perhaps to rebuke a hurricane than it does to change water into wine, yet the emotional impact upon the observers was much greater. Here also is painted the sagacity of the Master: by producing so great a variety of miraculous evidence of His identity, nature and power, He leaves no room for doubt even in the weakest disciple that Jesus can do ANYTHING that God can. Even though one of the extraordinary characteristics of Bible miracles, that distinguish them from heathen prodigies, is the notable absence of the love of the marvellous in the matter-of-fact tone in which the Gospel writers narrate these events, yet the astonishment registered in the reaction of these disciples to this miracle rings true psychologically. (See A. B. Bruce, *Training*, 49) Had they NOT been surprised, we might have wondered at the truth and authenticity of the story. As it is, Matthew and Peter (through Mark) both faithfully record their own unbelief and surprise, even though it pictures them yet less developed, less mature than their later offices required. As Bruce accurately observes, by the time they wrote these facts into our present Gospels, their sense of wonder at these tremendous deeds had been deadened by being satisfied. They had seen too many miracles while with Jesus to be able any longer to react to them as we find them doing in this text. But even though their sense of wonder at the power of Jesus did not continue, they never ceased to be deeply moved at the marvel of His grace.

The men reminds us also of the **other boats** and pricks our curiosity about their occupants and owners too. If, as suggested above (8:23), they survived the storm to witness the miracle, how did they react? Foster (*Middle*, 111) asks: "Did the men in these boats turn back after the storm feeling they had had enough for one day and seen enough for a lifetime? There is nothing to indicate that they were present when Jesus and the Apostles landed at Gergesa." If they turned back to Capernaum after the calm, their account of the news would have whipped Capernaum's excitement to fever pitch. What a story they would have had to tell! This explains the "great crowd" (Mk. 5:21) that gathered about Jesus to "welcome Him" (Lk. 8:40) immediately at the seaside when He returned next day.

What manner of man is this? What indeed! (See Psa. 89:9; 107:29) Have we learned better what these men had not yet

fathomed, that of which they were but then beginning to catch a glimpse: the voice which the wind and sea obeyed was the voice which spoke the world itself into being? Although the Evangelists record only this puzzling question as the only one uttered, the very question itself was probably the cause of many others: Indeed where WAS our faith? Why did we ourselves fail? How could we have questioned His control over this storm? Perhaps the more reflective among them pondered: when or how will we fail Him again? Note how deftly the three Evangelists conclude their narration with this thought-provoking question. They add no answer that might have been uttered that night. This splendid literary device is rhetorically perfect to kindle fires of thought and set the thoughtful reader to musing.

LESSONS TO OBSERVE FROM THIS TEXT:

1. When Jesus is in the boat, it is **SINFUL UNBELIEF** to say: "We are perishing!" All who sail with Jesus are **SAFE**, however great the storm. Jesus' very incarnation was His way of "getting into the boat with us" by which He shares our storms with us. Though He is not physically present in the boat in our present storms, He is nonetheless sympathetic and powerful to save.
2. And since Jesus has been "in the same boat with us," it is just as presumptuously sinful to scream: "Do you not care if we perish?" His human suffering is God's evidence proving that Jesus cares more than we can ever imagine. He cared so much if we perish that He went to the extreme limit of the cross, worked the supreme miracle of the resurrection, just to show us just how much He cared! "Do you not care?" does not apply to Jesus!
3. Though fear as an instinct is fundamental, yet we cannot let fear destroy our confidence in His control. Let us abandon our total dependence upon human help, and failing resources, casting ourselves completely, confidently upon Jesus. No matter how great our trials, things are still in His control.
4. We dare not leave Jesus to last place in our life as a mere escape hatch for emergency use only. He wants to be our Companion and all-powerful Friend and Guide throughout life. Let Him be the **FIRST** one to whom we turn!
5. It is quite possible but just as inadmissible to mix doubts about Jesus with faith in Him. Jesus wants all or nothing.
6. Our shattered nerves, our broken hearts, our wasted energies,

our straining muscles, our haunted lives need this word of Jesus: "Peace! Be still!"

7. However imperfect our faith and prayers, Jesus is still waiting to answer our cry, strengthen our faith and justify our confidence in Him.
8. All these foregoing points have no significance unless we understand that Jesus is God whose word created and sustains the universe and in whose control our destiny rests.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List all of the events that the Gospel writers clearly indicate as having taken place on this day which concludes with the storm on Lake Galilee.
2. What is significant about the quantity and nature of the events you have listed in question 1, that explains a detail described in this account of Jesus' stilling the tempest?
3. True or false? Jesus and His disciples were the only witnesses to what transpired on the lake that night. Prove your answer.
4. Describe the tempest, explaining both its nature, as described by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and its possible natural origin.
5. Quote the cries of the apostles as they awoke Jesus.
6. Describe Jesus' reaction to their cries.
7. Give all the words that the Evangelists use to describe the reaction of these Apostles to Jesus' stilling the tempest.
8. Justify Matthew's use of language when he describes Jesus as "rebuking the winds and the sea." Anyone knows that both the wind and the sea are inanimate objects with no conscience or soul to rebuke.
9. What is so remarkable, from a natural point of view, about the fact that, immediately after Jesus rebuked the storm, there was a dead calm?
10. Matthew and Mark say that "there *arose* a storm on the sea;" while Luke affirms that "a storm of wind *came down* on the lake." Show the perfect harmony between the narratives, that explains this apparent contradiction.
11. At what time of day did the storm start? What effect would this fact have on the disciples' nerves, if any?
12. Describe the probable type of boat Jesus and His disciples were in, how it was propelled, or maneuvered. Picture how it would react in this storm.

Section 17

JESUS FREES THE
GADARENE DEMONIACS

(Parallels: Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

TEXT: 8:28—9:1

28. And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, there met him two possessed with demons, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass by that way.
29. And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?
30. Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding.
31. And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine.
32. And he said unto them, Go. And they came out, and went into the swine: and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea and perished in the waters.
33. And they that fed them fled; and went away into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to them that they were possessed with demons.
34. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought *Him* that he would depart from their borders.
- 9:1. And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- From the information given in this text in the speeches of the demons themselves, what is revealed about their nature?
- Why did the herd of pigs react so violently?
- What is the value of the testimony of those who kept the swine in this incident?
- Why should people, whose public enemies numbers one and two had been completely "rehabilitated," request their Benefactor to leave? Why, do you think, did Jesus so meekly leave this territory without actively opposing His expulsion? Could He not have reasoned with this superstitious populace and have gained thus entrance into the Decapolis?

- e. Since it was apparently under Jesus' orders that the disciples took the boat back to Capernaum with Jesus on board, what does this indicate about Jesus' original desire to get away from Capernaum for awhile? (See Notes on 8:23) Did Jesus change His mind after He left Capernaum? If so, tell the sequence of events which may have led the Lord to decide to return to Capernaum instead of sailing further south on the east side or else landing on the western shore south of Capernaum.
- f. Do you think that we have anything today similar to the demon-possession as described in the Bible? What is the basis for your conclusion?
- g. Why do you suppose the demoniacs lived in the tombs?
- h. Could these demons foretell the future? What makes you think so?
- i. Explain why the men who tended the swine fled.
- j. Do you think the following question is fair: "If Jesus is truly just, why then did He permit this loss of property to the owners of the swine?" If you think it is fairly stated, answer it; if not, show how it does not justly represent the situation involved. In this latter case, how would you rephrase the question and then answer it?
- k. Why do you think the freed demoniac made the request that he did?
- l. Can you give at least one reason why Jesus sent the man back to his own city to tell them what God had done for him?
- m. How does Jesus' technique of sending the freed demoniac back to his own people in the Decapolis, harmonize with Jesus' own admission of the general proverb: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and among his own people"? (cf. Lk. 4:24; Mt. 13:57)
- n. From an objective reading of the three synoptic accounts of the demoniacs' approach to Jesus, can you decide whether the actions of these two are attributable to the influence of the demons or to the men themselves, as they struggle against the malign influence? For instance, what prompted them to "worship" Jesus? Would demons have been likely to worship Him? What makes you say so?
- o. If you decide that the demons actually worshipped Jesus through the outward actions of these demoniacs under their influence, what may be learned regarding the respective positions of Jesus and the demons in relationship to each other?
- p. If you decide that the men actually worshipped Jesus in a wild, desperate attempt to seek help in being rid of the demonic influence, then what may be deduced respecting the personal re-

sponsibility and control or freedom of anyone who is demon-possessed?

- q. Some suggest that the demons chose to enter the swine with hatred for Jesus and planned to drive the hogs to destruction in a deliberate attempt to discredit Jesus before the local populace through the eradication of the swine herd. If so, could not Jesus have foreseen this and forestalled the consequent rejection by the townspeople? Do you think Jesus was gullible enough to let Himself be tricked by the demons?
- r. Where do you think the ex-demoniacs found the clothes in which they were seen dressed, sitting at Jesus' feet, by the time the crowds from the town arrived? Considering their former manner of life under demonic control, their wild, naked existence, would they have been likely to have a suit packed away in one of the tombs? Where did the clothes come from?
- s. Whose idea was it to make the plunge into the lake, the demons' or the hogs'? Or was this the purpose of neither, hence, an accident?
- t. If you conclude that the demons upon entering the swine had no intention of driving them into the lake, but rather deceived themselves into supposing a peaceful habitation in those animal bodies in order to postpone being hurried into the abyss, are the commentaries right in suggesting that the demons' succeeded in thwarting Jesus' further work among these people?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then, after the calming of the tempest, they arrived on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (which is opposite the province of Galilee, as you look at it on the map), to the country whose chief Roman city is Jerash or Gerasa. Closer to the sea is the town of Gadara while Gergesa is located on the shore. All three towns have given their name to the territory.

As Jesus came ashore, there met Him two demoniacs from the nearby city who were coming out of the tombs where they lived. For a long time they had worn no clothes and did not stay in a house at all. They were men in the grip of an unclean spirit. They were so violent that none dared use that road anymore. No one had yet been able to subdue them, not even chains could hold them. Many had been the times they had been secured with fetters and lengths of chains but they merely snapped the chains and broken the fetters to pieces and made off for solitary places. No one was able to do anything

with them. And so, unceasingly, night and day, they would scream among the tombs and on the hills, gashing themselves with stones.

When they saw Jesus in the distance, they ran and flung themselves down on their knees before Him and worshipped. (Jesus commanded the foul spirit, saying, "Come out of him!") Then the demons began yelling at the top of their voices, "What business have You here with us; what do You want of us, O Son of the most high God? Have You come here to torment us before the appointed time? For God's sake, we beg of You, do not torture us!"

Jesus questioned him, "What is your name?" To this, the most prominent demoniac replied, "My name is Legion, for there are many of us," for many demons had entered the men. The spirits begged and begged Jesus earnestly not to banish them from the country into the bottomless pit.

In the distance on a hillside there was a large drove of hogs feeding. So the demons begged Jesus, "Send us over to the pigs and we will take possession of them!" So Jesus gave them permission, saying, "Go!" and the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs. The whole herd of about two thousand head stampeded over the edge of the cliff and down the steep slope into the sea, where they were drowned.

When the hog-feeders saw what had taken place, they took to their heels, and made for the town where they poured out the whole story, not forgetting the part about what had happened to the demoniacs. All over the countryside they told the news! Notice that the whole town came out to meet Jesus and to learn what it was that had happened. They saw Him and former demoniacs sitting at Jesus' feet clothed properly, and in full control of themselves—the very ones who had had the legion of demons! The crowds were afraid. Those who had seen the incident told them what had happened to the demon-possessed men and about the tragedy of the pigs. Upon this all the inhabitants of the surrounding country near Jerash began to implore Jesus to get out of their neighborhood; for they were terrified.

When Jesus was boarding the boat, one of the former demoniacs begged Jesus to let him go with Him but Jesus would not allow it but sent him away, saying, "Go to your own home and friends and tell them how much God has done for you and how the Lord has had mercy on you."

So the man went all over the town spreading the news of how much Jesus had done for him. He did this, in fact, throughout the Decapolis. Those who heard him were simply amazed.

So, Jesus, boarded the boat and crossed over the lake to the other side and came to His own city of Capernaum.

SUMMARY

After the stilling of the tempest, perhaps even the same evening, Jesus and His disciples landed at Gergesa. They were met on the shore by two demoniacs who recognized Jesus for His divine authority. Jesus cast out the demons, giving them leave to enter a swine herd. The frightened swineherds alerted the local populace to come see what had happened. The superstitious folk unanimously begged Jesus to depart. The chief ex-demoniac pleaded to be permitted to accompany Him, but was sent home to testify to God's goodness in his behalf.

NOTES

I. THE VIOLENT

8:28 **And when He was come to the other side** of the Sea of Galilee following the stormy crossing, the events occur which follow. However, the time element is not clear since this event follows hard on the stilling of that tempest, which, in turn, took place after the disciples and Jesus set sail "when evening had come" (Mk. 4:35) This phrase used by Mark (*opsias genoménes*) must be interpreted according to context to determine just what time is meant, whether before or after sundown. (Arndt-Gingrich, 606) So, if the storm blew the disciples in an easterly direction, like the wind after the feeding of the five thousand (cf. Jn. 6:17 with Mk. 6:48), it would not be impossible for them to have arrived at Gerasene shore not too long before sunset. Thus, the freeing of the demoniacs possibly took place that evening. Rejected by the native population, Jesus and His disciples either slept in the boat for the return trip to Capernaum, or else slept on the beach where the local people found them the next morning and asked them to leave.

to the country of the Gadarenes. A quick survey of the parallel texts in various translations will reveal divergent names for this area. The Greek texts are not much more help, although there is a firmer consensus of opinion among the editors of Greek texts that Matthew's original wording was "Gadarenes" while that of Mark and Luke was "Gerasenes." This apparent confusion is due to the error of scribes, seeking to correct what was thought to be an error in an earlier manuscript, when they had the correct original reading in hand. **The country of the Gadarenes** is the political territory around

Gadara, the chief city having jurisdiction over the land on the south-east side of the Sea of Galilee. This could certainly include the lesser town, Gergesa, a name also found in the manuscripts at this place. Gadara was one of the well-known cities of the great Decapolis city much farther away from the Galilean Sea to the south-east about 30 air-miles. Or, this latter name may be a pronunciation variant of the word Gergesa, found in the manuscripts. (See *ISBE* 1217b) Barnes (*Matthew*, 91) notes that these different names simply prove that the Evangelists are not deceivers, since, were they imposters attempting a hoax, they would have sought to agree! But their testimony is the more valuable, since this divergency demonstrates that these independent witnesses knew their land!

One fact stands out clearly: as will be seen from the map, the Arabic name Khersa or Kurseh clings to the ruins of a city mentioned by McGarvey (*Lands*, 328). At the southern side of the mouth of a deep ravine through the eastern mountains called Wady Samakh are to be found these remains. McGarvey describes the area:

Immediately south of (Khersa) rises a rocky mountain penetrated by tombs, which extends more than a mile along the lake-shore, at first leaving a plain more than a quarter of a mile wide between its base and the water's edge, but finally projecting one of its spurs close to the shore. Here, as Captain Wilson has clearly shown, must be the place where the hogs into which the demons entered "ran violently down a steep place into the sea." (Mt. 8:32) He says: "About a mile south of this (Khersa), the hills, which everywhere else on the eastern side are recessed from a half to three-quarters of a mile from the water's edge, approach within 40 feet of it; they do not terminate abruptly, but there is a steep, even slope, which we would identify with the 'steep place' down which the herd of swine ran violently into the sea, and so were choked. . . . It is equally evident, on an examination of the ground, that there is only one place on that side where the herd of swine could have run down a steep place into the lake, the place mentioned above."

Angry, fear-filled eyes had been following the progress of the boat in which Jesus and the Apostles had crossed the Sea of Galilee. Apprehension grew in the two as the boat bearing the Son of God drew nearer and nearer the shore. As the Creator and Lord of heaven, earth and hell stepped ashore, the two watchers ran to accost Him. **There**

met Him two possessed with demons, coming forth out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass that way. See the Paraphrase-Harmony for the full description of their terrible case. Mark (5:6) intimates that from their home in the tombs, from a distance, the demoniacs had watched Jesus and the disciples disembark. Now they run to Him, fling themselves on the ground at His feet and worship. (Luke 8:28) Here is tragedy; these men belonged to the city (Lk. 8:27), but they came out of the tombs.

Out of the tombs is probably not intended to suggest that the demoniacs became such by some league with the devil through communication or companionship with the dead, for Luke (8:27) states the natural antithesis of this abode thus; "He lived not in a house, but in the tombs."

However, see Isaiah 65:4 which connects base idolatry with sitting in graves. Is there some connecting link between idolatry, necromancy and demon possession? The gods of the Gentiles are called demons. (See Deut. 32:17; Psa. 106:36-37; Rev. 9:20; I Cor. 10:20, 21) False religions are also connected with demons. (I Tim. 4:1; I Jn. 4:3-6; 2 Th. 2:2, 3, 9-12; I Cor. 12:10; Rev. 16:13, 14; I Kings 22:22, 23; Zech. 13:2)

The hillside between the ruins of modern Khersa (Gergeṣa?) and the spur closest to the sea is literally studded with natural and hewn caves which were used as tombs. These two demoniacs were able from their shelter in the tombs to hinder passage along the road that followed the seacoast by rushing out screaming, terrorizing all who attempted to use the road.

Two possessed with demons. This alleged contradiction with Mark and Luke who mention only one demoniac is a simple difference in style of writing, since there are several cases where Matthew speaks of two persons or things in a given situation, while the other two Synoptic authors, in describing the same situation, mention only one. (See McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, III, 57) Obviously, Mark and Luke mention only the more fierce of the two, while Matthew objectively describes the total picture. In addition, the other two authors do not affirm that there was only one demoniac; hence, there is no contradiction.

Demons. For fuller notes on Demons, see the special study "Notes on Demon Possession" by Seth Wilson in THE GOSPEL OF MARK

by Johnson-DeWelt, pp. 509-513, with its selected bibliography. The very mention of demons brings us moderns to an immediate crisis of conscience: here before us are records that purport to be true, which includes the assertions that Jesus Christ talked with, and cast out of their human victims, certain, spiritual beings of which there is very limited scientific knowledge today. Did Jesus really cast out demons?

A. Assuming the accounts which record this phenomenon are false, we can have no certain knowledge about Jesus, since there are no objective grounds whereby the accounts themselves can safely be excised from the total record without destroying the fabric of the whole testimony of each Evangelist that mentions Jesus' casting out of demons. Only the subjective presupposition that demons do not exist (a prejudice in itself) has been seriously offered. (See special study on miracles at the end of chapter nine.) Foster (*syllabus in loc.*) lists the following radical explanations offered by some:

1. "The whole story is a myth." But there is just not time historically available for the development of the legend between the supposed occurrence of the facts and the writing of the record and its reception by hundreds of witnesses who both knew the facts and could testify to the contrary, were that necessary.
2. "The freeing of the man from the demon and the people's rejection of Jesus are true but the swine detail is a later, untrue addition." Again, there is no objective evidence, textual or otherwise, of any addition.
3. "The demoniacs frightened the swine: thus the supposed transfer of the demons into the swine was imagined." But again Jesus' own words are proof against this: He permitted the demons to go. Nor is there any evidence that the demons left the men with such a paroxysm so great as to scare the hogs.
4. "The drowning of the swine and the casting out of the demons are simultaneous events with no connection between them." However the inspired Apostles record the connection, for they were eyewitnesses and could not confuse hearsay reports about the two events.
5. "The demons were just mentally insane, whom Jesus humored by granting permission to imaginary demons to enter the swine, giving rise to the fable of the demons entering the

swine so producing their destruction." Explain, please, the two thousand dead hogs bobbing up and down in the water.

Thus we are compelled to reject not merely the objectionable parts of the narrative that do not suit our preconceptions, but rather the narrative in its totality, since there is no sure method whereby we can safely reject one part of the eyewitness' testimony and accept any other part. Further, we must admit that the record is free from the influence of popular Jewish ideas. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 480-485, also Vol. II and appendix XIII, p. 748-763 and appendix XVI, 770-776) demonstrates that it is not merely deceiving, but totally untrue to assert that these reports are tainted with the ideas prevalent in that superstitious age. These reports are just as different from the ideas that Judaism expressed on demons and demon possession as the difference between empty superstition and what is sober, credible history. (See also *ISBE* article, 828, 829.) We are driven to:

- B. Assume the accounts which contain the reports of demon possession and the casting out of demons are true. But even the assumption that the accounts are true, does not free us from responsibility to weigh carefully this evidence. For:
1. Either Jesus did not know demons did not exist.
 - a. In this case He was Himself deceived, for He actually thought He was casting them out, which, in fact, He never did.
 - b. And He is as ignorant and superstitious as the people He pretended to teach and help.
 2. Or else Jesus knew that demons did not exist.
 - a. In this case He is a conscious deceiver, since He continually "went through the motions" of casting out demons, encouraged His disciples to believe that they too had the power to do the same (Mt. 10:8); scolded them for their failure to do so (Mt. 17:14-21). He Himself claimed to cast them out and gave God thanks for this power (Lk. 10:17, 18, 21) as well as argued on the basis of the actual fact, not the hypothesis, that He had so done. (Mt. 12:27-29)
 - b. Even a theory that describes Jesus as "accomodating Himself" to the popular superstitions of the day, in order to deal with what modern scientific knowledge would term "an unbalanced mental condition, manias, insanity, etc." leaves Jesus under the morally fatal charge of deception,

by permitting even His closest disciples to remain under the old delusion. He is hereby to be charged with withholding vital information from us on so important a subject in the modern period.

3. Or else Jesus knew that demons exist and dealt with them accordingly.

- a. But Jesus did not treat demoniacs as merely sick, nor demons themselves as another disease, although when the demons were gone out of their victims, who had shown also characteristics of disease, the demoniacs were well.
- b. Nor did Jesus treat demons as mere "sins". There is no evidence that He regarded demoniacs as particularly guilty, beyond other sinners.

However, Edersheim (*Life*, I, 481) argues that there is no evidence for permanent possession or that the demonized were under constant power of the demon. An illustration of this is the impression of a sudden influence in the demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue as if occasioned by the demon's reacting to the spiritual effect of the words or Person of Jesus (Mk. 1:21-28). Consider also the epileptic demonized boy (Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14:29, esp. 18; Lk. 9:39). The boy was possessed from childhood (Mk. 9:21). Accordingly, says Edersheim (*op cit.*, 484), this fact "establishes a moral element, since, during the period of their temporary liberty, the demonized might have shaken themselves free from the overshadowing power, or sought release from it." Is Jesus discussing demonology when He taught that "when the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none, whereupon he returns with seven other spirits more evil than himself"? (Mt. 12:43f)

- c. Jesus dealt with demons as spirits who inhabited the body and governed the mind of human beings. He addressed them as evil visitors from the spirit world whose malignant control over those made in God's image roused His indignation and sympathy.

There met him two demoniacs, but Jesus saw them as men:

1. Violently antisocial: "they lived not in a house but in the

- tombs," "fierce," "night and day among the tombs and on the mountains," "driven by the demon into the desert."
2. Indomitable: "None could bind him any more with fetters and chains, no one had the strength to subdue him."
 3. Extremely tormented to the point of brutal self-abuse: "he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones."
 4. Unclean spirit (Mk. 5:2) Up to this point one might have pointed to natural mania or some other violent insanity. Here the line is sharply drawn, for the man was the vile home of other personalities who were destroying him.

There met him two demoniacs, and Jesus met them. He stood His ground calmly while the fiercest, wildest beings alive ran, screaming toward Him. He had earlier been charged by the Pharisees with being the very incarnation of Satan's power, but now is the moment of truth as He stands calmly awaiting the most terrifying conflict with naked evil. What thoughts race through the minds of the disciples as these frightening figures rush toward their Master? The Apostles' worst nightmare was occurring in broad daylight. They probably did not run because Jesus did not. When Jesus is in this thing, we are not to panic regardless of the danger or fear we feel! The Pharisees had snarled that Jesus had some secret agreement with the Devil. This calumny is about to be brought to its most startling test.

II. THE VANQUISHED

The two demoniacs **ran and worshipped Him** (Mk. 5:6). But why? Who really did this: the demons or the men themselves?

- a. If the demons worshipped Jesus, then out of what motives?
 - (1) Recognition of their real Master, greater than Satan, and their final Judge for eternity? (See on 8:29)
 - (2) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 289) supposed two malignant purposes:
 - (a) The demons perhaps used cunning flattery and fawning to dissuade Jesus from casting them into the abyss;
 - (b) By pretending friendship between themselves and Jesus, they could hope maliciously to injure His cause, and show thereby that the wicked calumny of the Pharisees was true.
- b. If the men worshipped Jesus, then this could be seen as a desperate bid for freedom against the awful possession which seemed unending. But, how could two mere men recognize

in Jesus the potential Savior when they terrorized all others who passed that way? Or, did Jesus' personal calm tame their habitual fierceness by showing them a reaction never before experienced, and in their surprise they are reduced to abject submission? Did Jesus' moral courage temporarily restrain the demons, giving their victims opportunity to express themselves thus? Could it be that the demons' fear of God's Son was communicated to the harried minds of their victims?

In this same general connection, it will be seen in the Gospel narratives several apparently contradictory elements in the speeches of the demoniacs, both in frequent changes from singular to plural and vice versa as well as changes from the man who seems to be speaking, to the demons who use the man's voice to speak their will. Eidersheim (*Life*, I, 608f.) deals with these phenomena thus:

In calling attention to this and similar particulars, we repeat that this must be kept in view as characteristic of the demonized, that they were incapable of separating their own consciousness and ideas from the influence of the demon, their own identity being merged, and to that extent, lost, in that of their tormentors . . . The language and conduct of the demonized, whether seemingly his own, or that of the demons who influenced him, must always be regarded as a mixture of the Jewish-human and the demoniacal. The demonized speaks and acts as a Jew under the control of a demon. Thus, if he chooses solitary places by day and tombs by night, it is not that demons really preferred such habitations but that the Jews imagined it, and that the demons, acting on the existing consciousness, would lead him, in accordance with his pre-conceived notions, to select such places . . . The demonized would speak and act in accordance with his previous (Jewish) demonological ideas. He would not become a new man, but be the old man, only under the influence of the demon.

This note argues the difficulty of deciding whether the men themselves worshipped Jesus or whether it were the demons, since their self-identity was lost in that of the other. As Mark (5:9) and Luke (8:30) say, Jesus endeavored to bring out the slightest possible trace of the demonized men's self-identity, but the answer reveals the depth of the confusion of the man's consciousness with that of the demons.

8:29 And behold they cried out, What have we to do with thee thou Son of God? The report of Mark and Luke

includes Jesus' personal name and describes God as "the Most High God." Plummer (*Luke*, 229) believes that this expression as a description of God given by the demons, "rather indicates that the man was not a Jew, and there is some evidence the owners of the swine were not Jews. 'The Most High' (*Elyon*) is a name for Jehovah which seems to be usual among heathen nations." His references cited are Gen. 14:20, 22; Num. 24:16; Mic. 6:6; Isa. 14:14; Dan. 3:26; 4:2, 24, 32; 5:18, 21; 7:18, 22, 25, 27; Acts 16:17. However, some of these are statements by Daniel not necessarily directed to heathens or spoken even for Gentile ears, even though stated within a Babylonian context, as Plummer notes. Further, see Stephen's thoroughly Jewish sermon, (Acts 7:48) and many other undoubted Jewish references in the OT (Psa. 7:17; 78:35; Dt. 32:8; 2 Sam. 22:14 etc.) Thus, the demoniacs could well have been very Jewish indeed.

Jesus, thou Son of God. It is remarkable that these denizens of hell refer to Jesus in terms totally contrasting with the common Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah. (See additional references to Jewish views made by Edersheim at 8:28 under A.) Further, they use terms that even Jesus had not publicized as often as His use of the title "Son of man," even though He accepted and used the term Son of God as true concerning Himself on other occasions. This fact immediately gives the lie to the possibility that these "anachronistic" terms were mythologically originated or else derived from supposed Jewish parallels. The point is that these demons, then, really did know Jesus! (cf. Mk. 1:24) They, however, are not the proper witnesses by which Jesus would have His identity proclaimed, even though these supernatural voices from the spirit-world provide corroboratory testimony.

What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? Here the personal testimony of the demons clarifies the true relationship between themselves and Jesus, and, at the same time, shows that they recognized Jesus' authority above that of Satan:

1. By their cries to be let alone. But, let alone to do what? They preferred their past course to be far better than any temporary or permanent judgment Jesus would bring.
2. By their denial of all connection with Jesus: **What have we to do with thee?** (*Ti hemin kai soi*) means "what do we have in common? What is there between us that unites us in a common bond? Nothing!" (See other examples: 2 Sam. 16:10; Jn. 2:4) Here the demons implicitly declare

the total lack of connection between Jesus and themselves. Now none could make the mistake of supposing that Jesus casts out demons with Satan's blessing and aid.

3. By their expressed understanding that He had the right to cast them into abyss. **Have you come here to torment us before the time?** There is no question in their minds about the torment: for them it is but a question of timing. It is a fair question whether this pained question by the demons, which is reported by Mark and Luke as an earnest pleading and, ironically, an adjuration by God, be further illuminated by the demons' later entreaty "not to command them to depart into the abyss" (Luke). That is, are these latter requests an expression of the demons' understanding of the meaning of the "torment" feared? **The time** referred to can be no other than God's final vindication of His wrath against all rebellion in His creation. (cf. Mt. 25:41; 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:12.) They are sure of the **torment**. (cf. Lk. 16:23, 25, 28; Rev. 14:10, 11; 20:10)

This adjuration, "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." (Mk. 5:7b) probably represents the desire of the demons, but expressed in the conscious thought-form of the Jewish speakers, since the men are so confusedly identified with them. (For similar form of adjuration see Mt. 26:63. For an example of exorcism by use of this same formula, see Acts 19:13.)

The abyss (Lk. 8:31) is a figure used in the OT for ocean depths (Psa. 33:7; 77:16; 107:26) or even deep fountains (Deut. 8:7) which gives the figurative picture of anything deep out of which immediate or easy escape or access is impossible. Thus, by the time of the NT period, it became a figure of "the depths, of the underworld," in the sense of the abode of the dead (Ro. 10:7); the dungeon where the devil is kept (Rev. 20:3), abode of the beast (Rev. 11:7; 17:8), of Abaddon (Rev. 9:11). But in Revelation **the abyss** denotes only the abode of evil spirits, although not the place of final punishment, since it is apparently distinguished from the "lake of fire and brimstone" wherein the beast and false prophet are thrown alive and into which the Devil is to be finally cast (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). (See *ISBE*, article "abyss", 26, 27; Arndt-Gingrich, 2)

Out of the country (*éxō tēs chóras*) may be the antithesis in the demons' mind with "do not send us into the

abyss," meaning "do not send us out of the district of this earth into the abyss." But this phrase is also perfectly consonant with the confusion, in the demonized wretches, of their interests with those of the demons: he does not wish to leave his home country to be sent into the unknown. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 612) supposes this means that the **demons** desired to remain in Gilead too, and gained their purpose through the permission to go into the hogs. But the destruction of the hogs frustrated this, although it is left unknown whether the demons yet had to go into the abyss or were left wandering homeless throughout the Decapolis.

4. By their overt acts of worship, the demons vigorously expressed their recognition of Jesus' authority. This focuses more clearly an answer to an earlier question: who worshipped Jesus—the demons or the men? Perhaps both, but certainly it is the demons that expect the final triumph of Christ!
5. By their implicit knowledge that it was useless for them to fight or flee, though they were an obvious numerical majority, while He was only One against a Legion. Though they had easily overpowered humans and terrorized the countryside, they stood calmly bowed before Jesus of Nazareth, knowing that their only respite could be gained through parley.
6. By their parleying for another place of abode, in place of banishment to the abyss, they reveal the almost certain knowledge that He could and would cast them out. This is more than insanity: this supernatural knowledge comes out of the spirit world.

This protest shouted by the demons is the expressed admission that the demons themselves stand in the presence of God's Holy One, before Whom all the powers of moral destruction cannot hold their peace: they must speak and confess their subjection and doom. It is unnecessary for Jesus to discuss or debate with these evil spirits. It is sufficient for them that Jesus is the Christ: He had already won the victory. Now it was merely a question of what to do with the captives! James' words (2:19) ring true: "The demons believe—and shudder!" In another connection McGarvey comments: "Let the sinner listen to that cry and learn what is to be under the domination of Satan."

At this point, Mark and Luke report that Jesus asked the principle demoniac, "What is your name?" His answer was: "My name is Legion; for we are many," for many demons had entered him. Note

the changes from singular to plural. **Legion:** There is no necessary connection between the usual size of a Roman legion, 4000-5000 men, and the actual number of demons in the two demoniacs. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 612) offers as a suitable translation of "Legion" a purely Jewish expression representing a large number, an idea more general than, strictly, a Roman legion. Who answered therefore, the man speaking for himself or the demons? Probably the demons spoke, still being in control, since it was not until they were ejected that that man's own rationality returns, showing itself in reasonable speech. (Mk. 5:18-20; Lk. 8:38, 39) But why did Jesus ask the man his name?

1. Perhaps Jesus was trying to draw out of the human being himself all the human identification He could possibly reach. Had this demoniac so completely lost his original identity with his family and the society from which he had come, that, as far as he was concerned, his own true name was completely blotted out from his disordered existence? If so, it is because he must see that he is a person, once free from, and even now not permanently bound to, the demons.
2. Perhaps to reveal the name of the demons to His Apostles. But if so, for what future purpose? Was it to expose the demons' vulnerability to His men, who would later cast them out? If so, these disciples must learn that even the fiercest of these spirits from the unseen world, however strong or numerous they may be, they are all subject to Jesus' world and to those who stand against the demons in Jesus' name!
3. Plummer (*Matthew*, 134), placing emphasis upon Jesus' human nature, suggests that He asked him for information, since Jesus may have chosen not to know by supernatural insight. If so, this question becomes another manifestation of the historical dependability of the narrative, since it would seem to imply some ignorance (even though willed) on the part of Christ, which the Evangelists, on the basis of apologetic motives, would have sought to remove. Any sharp-eyed critic can see the scandalous character that would be pictured for Jesus among those who do not understand His unique incarnation.

8:30 Now there was afar off from them a herd of many swine feeding. Two thousand head of swine (Mk. 5:13) were feeding on the hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee about a mile south of modern Khersa. (See map of the Sea and notes on 8:28) But what were so many pigs doing in Jewish country? But that is just

the point: this was not merely Jewish territory, but rather the sub-territories of the famous independent cities of the Greek Decapolis. (Mk. 5:20) It may well be that that herd of swine represents Greek contempt for Jewish prejudices. Yet, since this event occurred within the tetrarchy of Philip, the owners of these swine could well be Jews, seeking profits from Gentile purchasers. They could have justified themselves, whining, "But we don't eat the stuff! We just grow the hogs and sell the pork to the heathen neighbors!"

8:31 And the demons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine. If thou cast us out is no expression of doubt, since Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to depart (Mk. 5:8; Lk. 8:29). It is rather a dickering device, whereby the demons can escape their worst fears and yet hope to pacify Jesus. They did not instantly obey Jesus' command, since they began to protest and barter instead of leaving. This fact, too, demonstrates the trustworthiness of the record, since the Apostles would probably have tried to cover up the obvious disobedience to Jesus' commands.

Send us into the swine. Why did they make this strange request? Several answers are possible:

1. They did not ask to be sent into other humans. Such a request would be self-defeating, as they would only be cast out again.
2. They apparently did not wish to remain disembodied. (cf. Mt. 12:43-45). If so, this suggests their inability to read the future, since they probably would not have made this request had they been able to foresee the outcome that ensued. Desperate to have a home, any home but the abyss, they seized upon those brute beasts which they probably must have surmised to be less precious to Jesus.
3. It might be that they requested this with malicious intent, surmising, from the damage that they had been able to do while inhabiting the two humans, that they could turn the swine into savage beasts, hence, damage Jesus' reputation. It would thereby appear that this Benefactor brings no unmixed blessings.

To any who would reject any of these reasons on the basis of the fact that the demons, in driving the herd into the sea, defeated their own supposed purpose, let it be noticed that nowhere is it stated that the demons "drove" the herd anywhere. What we see in the hogs' action is THEIR decision, not that of the demons! If it be asked why the demons, who had so obviously taken men under control, could not have prevented the swine from destroying themselves, thus disembodimenting

the demons again, it might be suggested that the demons could not control these beasts without as much intelligence or will power as men. The hogs turned savagely wild, ran the easiest direction i.e. downhill and the herd found the lake in its path and could neither turn nor stop.

8:32 And he said unto them, Go. And they came out and went into the swine: and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep into the sea, and perished in the waters. Down the steep slope that fell away toward the road that skirted the seacoast. For a description of the land, see on 8:28 and *ISBE*, 1166a. This was not necessarily a sheer precipice, as some artists draw it. Mark notes that the herd numbered "about two thousand." There is no necessary connection between the number of demons i.e. "Legion" Roman legion of 4000-5000 men, and the size of the herd. Actually, just a few wild hogs could stampede the whole herd. There is no need to seek a harmony between "2000 hogs and 4000 demons", since no Gospel writer affirms the latter figure.

And he said to them, Go. Whether this word be construed as mere permission or as a repeated command (cf. Mk. 5:8 and Lk. 8:29), by its use Jesus unleashed the demons to go their chosen path. But by the same word, Jesus unleashed another storm of controversy among modern scholars about His right to say it. The moral problem, it is said, lies around the question: How could Jesus allow this destruction of personal property which did not belong to Him? How could Jesus have permitted the demons to have what they requested without becoming also morally responsible for the damage that was produced? Several answers have been suggested:

1. If evil blinds its victims to hinder them from considering all possibilities in a real world, could the demons have foreseen the reaction of the hogs, that, finding themselves in the fearful grip of this horrible power, rushed around in wild panic until, against the will of the demons, they plunged further and more wildly down the hill to their destruction? Thus, the demons, victims themselves of the deception of evil, had not foreseen the frustration of their desire, as Jesus could well have planned.
2. Would Jesus, thus, have been so short-sighted and gullible as to have accepted so apparently benign and harmless a plan as the demons proposed? Did He not, rather, foresee both the destruction of the herd and the frustration of the demons? Otherwise, would He not have simply demanded the immediate

passage of the demons into the abyss? As it is, He accomplishes a double purpose of His own, presuming that His permission was a judgment upon the swine owners too. If these latter were Jews, then they were violating the spirit of Moses' Law in keeping swine. (See Lev. 11:7, 8; Isa. 65:3-5; 66:3, 17) Jesus' permission to destroy the herd becomes to them a shocking reminder of duty to God.

3. Another suggestion describes Jesus' permission as like God's general permission of all evil and all evils till the end of all all evil. God permits tornadoes, floods, animal diseases and other natural disasters to destroy herds or portions thereof every year. Hence these owners had no more right to complain than other owners who lose animals to whatever cause.
4. Others say that, as Creator of the universe, Jesus had a right to do what He wished with His own. The local owners of the swine were but temporary stewards of their possessions, whereas the Owner of the world suddenly chose to "liquidate" His swine holdings. What is so unusual about this act of God incarnate? (See Psalm 50:10-12) Is it not He who gives and He who takes away, in order that thereby He may bless His children? (Study Job 1:21, 22) Why should He not decide to destroy the man's herd of hogs in order to give him a brother for whom to care? Plummer is right in saying (*Matthew*, 133), "Brutes and private property may be sacrificed where the sanity and safety of human beings is concerned." The slaughter of these brute beasts, were it personally willed by Jesus Himself (of which there is, of course, no proof), is of no relative importance compared with the saving of the souls of two men! As God, Jesus could dispose of His own possessions as He choose, and what human subject could object?
5. Those who see a real moral difficulty here and thereby endeavor to reduce Jesus to a mere man, face the equally great difficulty involved in succeeding. For if they can reduce Jesus to a mere man, He could not have foreseen this destruction and cannot be blamed anyway! Thus, the answer to the apparent dilemma lies elsewhere.
6. Trench (*Miracles*, 102) suggests an interesting principle that is worth studying:

To the evil all things turn to evil. The wicked Satan (Job 1:11) and his ministers are sometimes heard, and

the very granting of their petitions issues in their worst confusion and loss. (Num. 22:20, 35; Josh. 13:22; Psa. 78:29-31) So it is now: the prayer of these evil spirits was heard but only to their ruin. They are allowed to enter the swine; but the destruction of the whole herd follows . . . they defeated their own purpose . . . there reveals itself here the very essence and truest character of evil, which evermore outwits and defeats itself. . . .

In seeking applications of this principle, it would be well to be aware of the fact that not all evil turns to evil *immediately*. Some evil men seem to succeed in turning all things to good during their lifetime. (cf. Job 21) These inequities will, however, be rectified at the judgment.

III. THE VILLAGERS

8:33 And they that fed them fled, and went away into the city. If our identification of the site of Gerasa, or Gergesa, as the location of the steep place is correct, then the herdsmen had about a mile to run. But why flee? What reaction is more natural, when the herd you are watching as it calmly roots or rests, suddenly begins to squeal and bellow, then rushes headlong down the slope into the lake below? You can give no normal explanation for this mad dash of the drowned herd now only so many corpses floating at the shore. You were charged with the safe care of this valuable herd. Why not run? But why flee to the town to shout the news of the herd's destruction? Who would believe the fantastic story about Jesus and the demoniacs?

1. They fled out of fear of the unknown: What had really caused the inexplicable actions of the hogs? Were they demonized? If there were spirits in the neighborhood, it is best to leave the place!
2. Fear of the consequences to the swineherds themselves if other mouths brought the owner word. It is better to tell it yourself than let him find out about it himself: he could hold you liable and punish severely.
3. But the swineherds were also eyewitnesses of the whole event. They had seen the whole proceeding. The still air of the quiet countryside had been pierced by the shrieks of the demoniacs as they approached Jesus, drawing also the interest and attention of these swineherds. So they **told everything and what was befallen to them that were possessed with**

demons. It was this message about the casting out of the demons that was foremost upon their lips as they rushed through the town shouting the news. It was the one fact that would lend credibility to their story about the swine.

8:34 And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart from their borders. All the city means the majority of its inhabitants, as we say, "Everybody and his dog was there," although we never mean the absolute totality of any population. The people had come:

1. **to meet Jesus**, because the swineherds had testified that it was Jesus that had cast out the demons. There could be no doubt that He possessed unlimited, supreme power.
2. **to see what it was that had happened.** (Mk. 5:14b) This was for these citizens a time of severe testing even though they probably did not realize it.
 - a. **To the demoniacs.** The very fact, that these their own fellowcitizens had been delivered from Satan's bondage, should have signalled beyond doubt to the gathered crowd that God's Kingdom had suddenly come among them. (cf. Mt. 12:28 and Acts 14:8-13 for a true pagan reaction) They were being tested whether they would hold all else cheap in comparison to the victory and joy at the release of two human beings, God's creatures and their townsmen. Was it to be nothing to them that the former demoniacs now freed, were sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in their right mind?

The expression "in his right mind" certainly implies that the demoniacs had been insane, which is correct. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 292) comments wisely: "This detracts nothing from the reality of demon possession; it only shows that the presence of the foreign spirit within a man disturbed, as from the nature of the case it must, the normal workings of his own spirit."

- b. **And to the swine.** The corpses bobbing up and down in the lake gave tangibility to the story told by the swineherds, who according to Mark and Luke, undoubtedly repeated their testimony to all comers.

And when they saw Jesus, they besought him that he would depart from their borders. They knew that He could not

be treated indifferently nor safely ignored: they must decide. They chose to ask Him to leave! Why?

1. Did they fear the loss of more property? Was it that they considered the loss of only two thousand hogs of more importance than the restoration of two men to useful life as citizens of their town? If so, what a horrid warped sense of values! Can it be that they would hold fast to the most forbidden sins, the most despicable life and the most perishable property, rather than rejoice in the presence of Jesus and the happiness, peace and blessing He brings?
2. Luke (8:37; cf. Mk. 5:15; Lk. 8:35) emphasizes the depth of their fear: "(they) asked him to depart from them; for they were seized with great fear." (Study Lk. 5:8; 8:25 for similar responses.) These sinners, when they had sized up the whole picture of Jesus, the freed demoniacs, the dead swine, they realized they were standing in the presence of naked supernaturalism, in the presence of sheer otherworld power. They stood on the battlefield of a spiritual-world and it unnerved them. These sinners stood in the presence of Jesus, the Holy One, the Son of the Most High God. But their gross ignorance of His mission of mercy and help to earth hindered them from understanding God's power and holiness. They found God's holiness incarnate, standing in their presence, intolerable, so they asked Jesus to leave. What other consequences would follow in their lives if He were allowed to remain? If illegal hogs could be destroyed in a flash, what would He do in their personal lives? Would they too soon be visited for their own many sins? Their own fear and guilt is the pain of their sinfulness in the presence of God's holiness, and it blinds them to God's mercy. (Cf. Job 21:14 where the same words reflect not so much fear as rebellion.) Perhaps the only reason none dare present Jesus with a bill for the payment for the destroyed swine is both secret acknowledgement of His right to have destroyed the animals and fear to admit the ownership of the illegal animals. Besides their suspicions, and proof He did it was circumstantial. Only the swineherds had seen the facts but perhaps had not heard the direct connection between Jesus' permission to the demons and the destruction of the hogs.

Plummer (*Matthew*, 134) points out that this "request of the inhabitants is a guarantee for the general trustworthiness of the narrative. Fiction would have made the inhabitants

anxious to detain Him that He might work other wonderful cures, where He was regarded, not as a dangerous magician, but as a great prophet. . . ."

IV. THE VALIANT

Mark and Luke narrate the anxious clinging of the freed demoniac to Jesus. Just as Jesus was boarding the boat to depart, the man begged Him that he might accompany Him. Here occurs one of the starkest lessons of discipleship: Jesus refused his request, even though so natural and apparently so needful. Why did Jesus do it? Edersheim (*Life*, I, 614) puts it so poignantly:

It would have seemed to him, as if he could not bear to lose his new found happiness; as if there were calm, safety and happiness only in His Presence; not far from Him—not among those wild mountains and yet wilder men. Why should he be driven from His fellowship, who had so long been an out-cast from that of his fellow-men, and why again left to himself? So, perhaps, should we have reasoned and spoken; so too often do we reason and speak, as regards ourselves or those we love. Not so He Who appoints alike our discipline and our work. To go back, now healed, to his own, and publish there, in the city—nay, through the whole of the large district of the. . . . Decapolis—how great things Jesus had done for him, such was henceforth to be his life-work. In this there would be both safety and happiness.

All of his fear, that the demons, in the absence of Jesus their Master, might return to repossess their former victims, then, diminishes in the man's confidence that Jesus' command to return home has become his assurance that Jesus' authority is complete. The demons will not return: he is safe even with Jesus gone. So long as the man is engaged in this mission on which Jesus sends him, his safety is guaranteed. If he fears the unfriendly populace which had rejected his Savior, then Jesus' command to evangelize them, to take the offensive, is his best defense. If his desire is to accompany Jesus as a close disciple out of deep gratitude for his salvation, Jesus indicates the direction his discipleship and gratitude must take: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord God has done for you and how He has had mercy on you." (Mk. 5:19; Lk. 8:39)

Note that both Evangelists record that the man did go home and told how much JESUS had done for him. The theological connections

between God and Jesus might not have been crystal clear to the man yet, but he could speak in concrete terms about the power of Jesus.

Contrast this commission given by Jesus to this ex-demoniac to go tell what God had done for him, with the injunctions to silence given to others:

1. This area is not Galilee but Gilead, less thickly populated and less excitable by Messianic rumors. Also Jesus had not yet worked here and needed this man's enthusiastic pre-campaign advertising here, not over in Galilee to which Jesus was soon to return.
2. The others healed by Jesus needed more inner reflection upon God's great action on their behalf in order to learn deeper appreciation of God's power and goodness. As Jesus' disciples, they needed to learn submission and self-control. But this ex-demoniac needed immediate association with people, to re-enter human society once more. He needed to be drawn out of himself, out of his lonely environment into usefulness to his fellows. Jesus knew that by his public proclamation of God's mercies this man could certainly maintain the spiritual health with which Jesus left him. (Psa. 66:16)
3. Jesus laid no unnecessary burdens of great sacrificial discipleship upon the man. He restored him immediately to his family and friends. He sent him home (Mk. 5:19; Lk. 8:39) and to go home and work for Jesus was just as much obedience as for others to leave home to work for the Master! (Lk. 9:59-62)

Read the enthusiastic reports of Mark and Luke about the man's ministry, or should we say, that man's obedience after the disappointment of not being permitted to join Jesus' immediate company! "He went away and began proclaiming throughout the whole city, nay, in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all men marveled." Oh my soul, can I take "no" for an answer from Jesus and still love Him and go right on preaching His Word where He is largely an unknown, rejected miracle-worker from Galilee?

It is easy to think of the valiant Twelve who remained by Jesus in His ministry and suffering; but they are also valiant servants of God who go it alone, knowing only that Jesus wills it? This man's preaching must have been tremendously effective, since everyone could remember him as the mighty terror of Gerasa. But now he was the living monument to the power and mercy of God in Jesus of Naza-

reth! No wonder he succeeded; his mission method was personal witnessing to the change wrought in his own life.

V. THE VICTOR

9:1 **And he entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his city.** To entitle this section which describes Jesus' retreat from Decapolis "the Victor," would seem to some exaggerated, since Jesus obviously accepts the fear-filled request of the selfish, superstitious villagers as sufficient reason to leave. But this is to forget the total picture painted by the three Evangelists: Calmly Jesus had stepped out of the boat to face the fiercest inhabitants of the Decapolis. The mere fact that He was the Christ was itself victory, and the demons must confess their submission and condemnation. With but one final authoritative word, He drove the unclean spirits from their victims. Against His ultimate command there was no appeal. What had been proved thereby? Edersheim answers so picturesquely (*Life*, I, 613):

He that had erst been the possession of foul and evil spirits—a very legion of them—and deprived of his human individuality, is now 'sitting at the feet of Jesus,' learning of Him, clothed and in his right mind.' He has been brought to God, restored to self, to reason, and to human society—all this by Jesus, at Whose Feet he is gratefully, humbly sitting, 'a disciple.' Is He not then the Very Son of God? Viewing this miracle, as an historical fact, viewing it as a parabolic Miracle, viewing it also as symbolic of what has happened in all ages—is He not the Son of the Most High God? And is there not now, on His part, in the morning light the same calmness and majesty of conscious Almighty Power as on the evening before, when He rebuked the storm and calmed the sea?

But what is so victorious about His retreat? Here is written the meekness of the Son of God. He could have mustered all manner of invincible argument why they should permit Him to remain. He could have shown a demonstration of supernatural power that would have overpowered their reason and frightened them into abject submission. But He did not. Jesus did not stay long where He was not wanted. (cf. Lk. 9:51-55; Mt. 13:54-58; Lk. 4:16-30) He simply left without a word.

But He left behind Him a one-man advertising campaign that would more than prepare for His Decapolis ministry next year! (See

Mt. 15:29-39; Mk. 7:31—8:10) Jesus' real purpose for coming to the Decapolis area was to save it. Though He must postpone His actual ministry there till a later date, yet the activity of this freed ex-demoniac brought a deep change in the attitude of the people. Later when Jesus returned He met an open-hearted reception. Contrary to several commentators who ignore Jesus' Decapolis ministry cited above, Jesus DID come back. His mercy is long-lasting. He gave Decapolis a second chance!

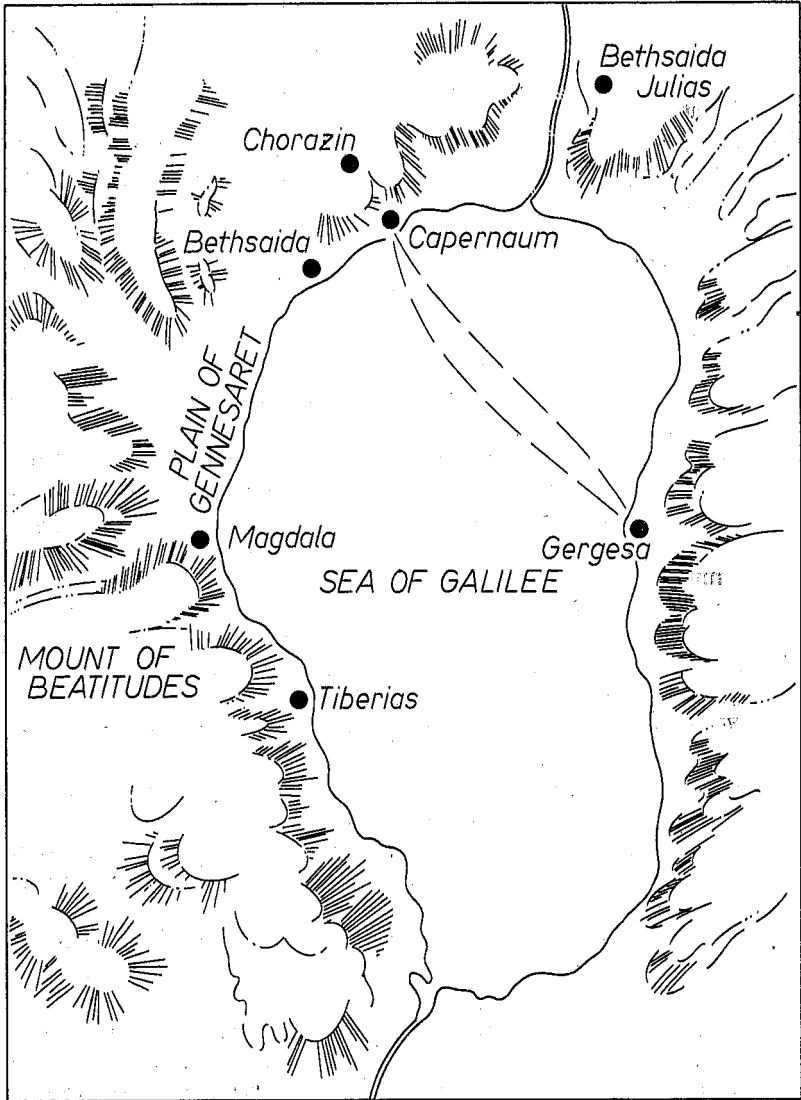
What is the proper theology regarding this section and many more like it? Jesus is NOT in league with Satan, but is successfully routing the devil's infantry at every encounter! Casting out demons, defeats also their lord, Satan. (cf. Lk. 10:17, 18; Mt. 12:29) No wonder Peter, in retrospect, described Jesus' ministry thus: "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where is the "country of the Gadarenes"? Explain about the three different wordings of this and how they harmonize.
2. How many of the Gadarenes were possessed with demons according to the Gospel accounts? Explain the apparently conflicting reports regarding the number of demoniacs by listing other occasions where Mark mentions one thing or person where Matthew mentions a multiple number.
3. What symptoms or actions indicated that they had demons?
4. How could people tell that the demons were gone from them?
5. Quote accurately what the demons said to Jesus and tell four or five things that are clearly indicated by their speeches.
6. What did the general populace ask of Jesus after the demoniacs were healed? Why?
7. What did one demoniac ask of Jesus after he was healed?
8. What did Jesus command him to do?
9. Explain the meaning of the demons' expression: "Are you come here to torment us before the time?" To what did they allude? What were they afraid of?
10. Tell what the NT teaches about "the abyss," "the bottomless pit" which was the horror of these demons. What is the difference between this and hell?
11. State the pleas made by the demons in reference to their future state, whereby they hoped to secure a compromise from Jesus. What other NT passages may explain why they made this particular plea?

CHAPTER EIGHT

This map of the Sea of Galilee indicates in a general way the movements of Jesus when He left Capernaum by boat, calmed the storm, debarked in Gadarene territory, freed the demoniacs and sailed directly back to Capernaum.



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER EIGHT:
"THE TOUCH THAT CLEANSSES"

(8:2-4)

Introduction: When Matthew wanted to show God's power at work in Jesus of Nazareth, he picked the most loathsome disease he could conceive.

I. THE LEPER'S INSISTENT REQUEST: It was:

- A. Original: there were no previous recorded instances of such a cure amid all the Judean and Galilean cures. Perhaps he reasoned: "It is no secret what God can do; what He's done for others He can do for me too!"
- B. Courageous: "full of leprosy" "in a city" directly to Jesus he came with a courage born of desperate hope.
- C. Pitiful: "Lord, if you will . . ." Is he not sure of Jesus' willingness?
 - 1. He had a repulsive disease from which people recoiled in disgust; it was a horrible, living death.
 - 2. His was a contaminating disease; rabbis wanted nothing to do with him or his kind; they even delighted in throwing stones to keep him at a distance so as to insure their ceremonial purity.
 - 3. He had an isolating or separating disease which barred him from human society.
- D. Believing: he had a perfect confidence in Jesus' power and even in Jesus' willingness to welcome the man whom everyone else would have driven away.
- E. Humble: There is no demand here, no thoughtless claim upon His time, or energies. His unspoken plea: "I cast myself upon your heart."

II. THE LORD'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: To a Jew trained in the strict observance of the Levitical mentality of ceremonial pollution and cleanness, there could be no more amazing sentence in the New Testament than the simple declaration: "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched the leper."

- A. From a human standpoint Jesus ran the risk:
 - 1. of ghastly infection: "What if Jesus became a leper too?"
 - 2. of moral contamination: "Should anyone, including Jesus, deliberately sully His life with such outcasts as lepers? Would not God also reject Him?"

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3. of social rejection: "What if the crowds rejected an unclean Christ?"

B. Jesus got involved and touched this leper. It was just like Jesus to do it! But when Jesus became man He had already gotten involved with our filthy, corrupting morals and our insoluble problems.

C. Jesus not only spoke cleansing but willed it! (Greek: *thélō*) "I will it—I want to cleanse you!" Jesus' answer was no naked word of power spoken at an uncommitted distance. Jesus loved him and desired to help him. Here we see a man who had been kept at arms' length by all men, now wrapped around with the compassionate love of God.

III. THE FIRST COMMAND OF JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLE: "Obey God's revelation for those in your situation!"

A. To the cleansed leper it was:

1. "Go show yourself to the priests for a testimony to them!" They too must hear of my power first."
2. "Offer the sacrifices Moses commanded for your cleansing! Not even so marvellous a cleansing as that from living death can excuse you from your normal duties to God."
3. "Keep still: revolutions are afoot; the success of my ministry cannot stand such display of ignorant popularity encouraged in unthinking crowds. Besides, your pride cannot stand display either. Tell it to no man!"

B. To us and our age, Jesus charges us who claim to be His followers:

1. Faith, repentance, baptism (Mt. 10:32; Lk. 13:3; Mt. 28:18-20).
2. Growth in discipleship (Mt. 11:28-30) and all that it involves.
3. Sharing His message and His life with our associates.
4. Getting involved in His work.

CONCLUSION. Jesus touched the untouchable, crossed the chasm and got involved in our suffering, our sorrows. Who can refuse such a Lover as He? No man can ever feel himself incurable in body or unforgiveable in soul while Jesus Christ lives! Do you fear the exposure of some hideous sin in your life? Are you deliberately separating yourself from human companionship because of some heartbreaking experience in your home and family? Do you wonder if anyone really loves you and cares what happens to you? Do you long above all else to turn to a useful, happy life of service, gratefully rendered to Jesus? Jesus calls you to His side. Will you come? Will you say, "Jesus, if you

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want to, you can cleanse me, restore me, heal me, fill me!" He lays His reassuring hands upon you, saying, "I want to, come to me. I will give you rest and cleansing."

"THE MASTER MARVELLED"

(8:5-13)

What can excite the wonder and admiration of Jesus of Nazareth? The times of Jesus' earthly ministry were days loaded with excitement, but they must not dim our sight of the Lord Himself. If we desire to delight this Master, let us pay attention to what brings Him highest joy. There are some genuinely impressive facts in this text: what one fact drew Jesus' attention leaving Him overjoyed and amazed? Matthew tells us of . . .

I. AN UNEXPECTED COMPASSION. Ours is a cruel, hard-nosed, "business is business" world, where men climb the heights to a success over the bent backs of their inferiors, the less fortunate.

A. An unlikely object of compassion was the centurion's slave.

1. Slaves in the Roman empire were no better than a living tool, differing from other things possessed by owner in the sense that the slave could talk. Slaves too sick, too old or too unable or unwilling to work could be disposed of in any manner the master chose.

2. But here in this household the anguished cry from a paralyzed human being, though a slave, was heard!

B. An unlikely person for expressing such compassion was the centurion.

1. His military career had not been able to extinguish his human concern for another human being.

H. P. Hughes commented: "I know nothing more noble, more indicative of the godlike man, than a proper courtesy and thoughtfulness and a disinterested and unselfish care for those who are our social inferiors."

2. The centurion was not Jewish, therefore, technically a pagan. What opportunities had he had for knowing God's revelation? What circumstances had God combined to bring him to his love for the subject people over which his own government had posted him to keep law and order?

C. No, while this compassion and unexpected generosity certainly surprises us, this is not yet what caused the Master to marvel.

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II. AN UNPRECEDENTED AFFECTION. (Read Luke 7:1-10) Here Jewish elders actually intercede with Jesus on behalf of the Capernaum centurion—yes, a centurion!

- A. He was more a candidate for assassination, not assistance.
1. In the Jewish struggle for independence from the Roman yoke, every Roman official, every collaborator with Rome, every supporter of Roman government would be viewed with suspicion, if not outright hatred.
 2. But here we find the precise opposite to be the case: responsible Jewish citizens expressing unprecedented affection for a centurion.
 - a. Why *should* they hesitate to help him? "He loves our nation. He built us our synagogue!"
 - b. Herein is a sentence sermon: Sterile orthodoxy that does not love, that does not act, is not orthodox!
 - c. The orthodox deeds of one Gentile centurion produced more concrete results, more humanity, more genuine affection and deep-felt appreciation than all the orthodox speculations of a hundred theologians.
- B. Who were these "elders"? Was Jairus among them? What about the royal official (Jn. 4:46-54) whose son Jesus had already healed?
- C. What opportunities had they had for knowing God's revelation? What witness had they given to this centurion concerning Jesus? Had they been as generous with the centurion as he had been with them? Many of these intriguing questions stimulate our imagination, as they fill in the flesh-and-blood outline of these real people.
- D. The actions of these men who normally would not be known to be so solicitous for a Roman's needs lead us to feel their unprecedented affection for him, and yet even this example rising above usual Jewish parochialism did not excite the wonder of our Lord so much as

III. AN UNEXAMPLED FAITH. That did it! Nothing turns the head of Jesus of Nazareth so quickly as the concrete expression of real belief! What was the formula of his "great confession"?

A. "I am not worthy."

1. He is a Roman who says this to an itinerate Jewish Rabbi!
2. This is obviously real humility: the higher he held Jesus, the lower he esteemed his own power, position, accomplishments and person.

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3. This confession of unworthiness was his highest claim to being actually worthy of the Kingdom! (Mt. 5:3)
- B. "I understand authority and I know you possess it." When he had learned to confess Israel's God as his own and to believe Jesus to be absolutely unlimited in the exercise of God's power, this centurion permitted no frivolous objections to hinder his decisive action, such as might be raised by scribes and Pharisees of his day.
- C. "Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed."
1. What an intelligent grasp of the fundamental principle underlying God's government of the world! (Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 1:1-4; 2 Pe. 3:5-7)
 2. The centurion knew that if one simple word from Jesus could not cure his slave, hundreds of mumbled or shrieked incantations from others were so far less incapable of bringing the slave back to life and health. One powerful word from Jesus is all that is needed: "Just give the command, Sir."
- D. This kind of faith brought Jesus joy, wonder and admiration just because it was so rare, strong, pure and real. Why great?
1. The centurion was sensitive to human need; religious people can be so unseeing, so deaf to concrete hard life problems.
 2. The centurion had overcome gigantic obstacles of prejudice to bow before this Jewish Teacher; more often "the right people" would have called this "improper" at least, or unthinkable, at most, for a man of his position. Honesty compelled him.
 3. Despite the difficulties that would have choked the momentary enthusiasm, the conflicting theories and contradictory logic and broken the reasonably resilient faith of others, the centurion arrived at a determined conclusion and with confident firmness confided his case to Jesus.
 4. The centurion was humble enough to recognize the high holiness of Jesus. Our "humility" is often so pretentious! By contrast, this centurion was willing not to be honored by the Lord's presence.
 5. The centurion, even though a Gentile and in much more need of it, did not ask Jesus for a confirmatory sign for verification of the reality of His power before working the miracle. (Contrast Gideon's fleece, Judg. 6:36-40; or the Jew's demand for signs, Mt. 16:1-4)

SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

6. The centurion showed careful planning by sending the elders, men whose religious views he thought would not be so likely to clash with Jesus as would perhaps the Gentile unworthiness of the centurion himself. Thus, he showed himself keenly sensitive even to Jesus' views, as a man.
7. His faith had been intelligently arrived at. Simple trust of Jesus may be acceptable, but Jesus is more stirred by a man whose faith is the result of his mental wrestling with facts, theories, alternatives, prejudices, personal ignorance and desires and who STILL decides to believe Jesus. The centurion had shown careful reasoning behind his actions.

This leads us around to

IV. AN UNTHOUGHT-OF-CONCLUSION. The tables are turned; the relations reversed!

A. The UNWELCOME are welcomed! (Mt. 8:10, 11)

1. Jesus praised the "pagan" centurion's faith: "I tell you I have not found so great faith!"
2. Jesus answered a "pagan's" prayer, wrapped the loving arms of God's compassion around both men:
 - a. around the hated man, the agent of a foreign government occupying one's homeland.
 - b. around the despised man, the slave, the living tool with no human rights and no legal existence except as property of his master.
 - c. "I will come and heal him . . . (later) Go your way; as you have believed, so be it done for you." Jesus knew neither Jew nor Roman, slave nor free, male nor female; He only recognized human need. No prejudice was strong enough to hold Jesus within its narrow, provincial bounds.
3. Jesus threw open the doors to God's Kingdom to believing Gentiles like this centurion. (Mt. 8:11)

B. The ELITE are excluded! Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are not the exclusive possessions of any exclusive race of men. He is the possession of every man in every nation in whose heart there is FAITH.

1. Jesus' amazement at the centurion's faith was caused directly by the contrast with the usual, dull lack of deep commitment He met in the very people who had enjoyed God's preparation for Messiah's coming.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

2. Jesus' voice reflected the tragedy of unbelief: "I have not found so great faith, *no, not in Israel!*" With a reluctance that throbbed with the love of God, Jesus condemned unbelievers to hell (vs. 12)

Yes, Jesus marvelled at the faith found in this very unlikely person, He encouraged the man as far as circumstances permitted and answered the centurion's request. Any Jew standing around could probably have said, "Who would have thought that THAT man could be the object of God's mercy?"

All of us make a very unlikely crowd to be the special objects of God's continued mercy! But the point is: He does care. Who would have thought that WE could be Christians? But we began with the confession: "I am not worthy. . . . Jesus, you are our Authority: only speak the word and we will live!"

CHAPTER NINE OUTLINES

- Section 18. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic (9:2-8)
- Section 19. Jesus Calls Matthew Levi to be Apostle (9:9-17)
- Section 20. Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter (9:18-26)
and Heals Woman's Hemorrhage
- Section 21. Jesus Gives Sight to Two Blind Men (9:27-34)
- Section 22. Jesus Evangelizes Galilee (9:35-38)

STUDY OUTLINE

- I. JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC (9:2-8) at a "Congressional Investigation."
 - A. Situation: house full of critics, Jesus in midst. Paralytic lowered through roof into Jesus' presence.
 - B. Crisis: Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic
 1. Pharisaic reasoning: "blasphemy!"
 2. Jesus' reasoning: "It is my right."
 - C. Conclusion: Jesus, as God, has power on earth to forgive sin.
- II. JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI TO BE APOSTLE (9:9-17)
 - A. The Call of Matthew (9:9)
 - B. The Concept of the Master: "I am Physician for the sick, at work where I belong. (9:10-13)
 - C. The Controversy: feasting versus fasting (9:14-17).
 1. Situation: Disciples of John and Pharisees fasted, while Jesus' disciples feasted.

CHAPTER NINE

2. Jesus' Defense: Things that do not harmonize should not be united.
 - a. Illustration: a wedding is no place for mourning
 - b. Illustration: new patches do not repair old garments.
 - c. Illustration: new wine bursts old wineskins

III. JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (9:18-26)

- A. Situation: Twelve year-old daughter of the leader of synagogue dead; father comes to Jesus requesting His help.
- B. Jesus' response: The broken heart of the father moves Jesus.
 1. Jesus' journey, interrupted by the woman He healed, was filled with agonizing delays for the father whose understanding was inadequate.
 2. Death notice delivered to father: extreme crisis of father's faith.
 3. Jesus ministered comforting words to Jairus, He was healing the father's heart also.
 4. Jesus stopped the funeral to call dramatic attention to what He is about to do.
 5. He then raises the daughter from death.

IV. JESUS HEALS A WOMAN'S HEMORRHAGE (9:20-22)

- A. Situation: Jesus hurried to Jairus' house, pressed by crowds on every side. Woman in crowd with unhealing 12-year hemorrhage, practically excommunicated from worship, from normal marital relations, practically penniless, decidedly incurable and unbelievably desperate.
- B. Jesus' Response: healing.

V. JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO TWO BLIND MEN (9:27-31).

- A. Situation: Coming away from Jairus' house, Jesus is accosted by two blind men requesting healing, who persist in following Him indoors.
- B. Jesus tests their faith.
- C. They respond affirmatively.
- D. Jesus healed them instantly with a word and a touch.
- E. Jesus demanded secrecy.
- F. Instead they publicized the miracle.

VI. JESUS FREES A DUMB DEMONIAK (9:32-34)

- A. Situation: A dumb demoniak is brought to Jesus;
- B. Jesus' Response: He cast out the demon, with the result that the dumb man could speak.

- C. The Crowd's Reaction: "Nothing ever seen like this in Israel!"
- D. The Pharisees' Reaction: "Jesus is in league with Satan."

VII. JESUS EVANGELIZES GALILEE AND SHARES HIS VISION WITH THE DISCIPLES (9:35-38)

- A. Situation: Jesus goes on a preaching and healing tour of Galilee.
- B. Jesus' Motivation: His compassion and intelligent love for the leaderless multitudes.
- C. Jesus' Challenge: Pray for helpers to reap the waiting harvest.

Section 18

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC

(Parallels: Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

TEXT: 9:2-8

2. And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.
3. And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.
4. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?
5. For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk?
6. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.
7. And he arose, and departed to his house.
8. But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose so many theologians began to gather around Jesus on this occasion? Were they slowly becoming His disciples too?
- b. Why did Jesus declare first the forgiveness of the man's sins? Would it not have been better first to heal the man and then declare his sins forgiven? It certainly would not have scandalized the religious

- leaders so drastically. What do you think about Jesus' method? What was He trying to accomplish by this abrupt approach? Did He not know that He would shock them by this method?
- c. Why did Jesus command the man to carry off his pallet?
 - d. Why could not the four men have waited until Jesus finished teaching and dismissed the crowds? What was so important about their friend's illness that demanded that they interrupt Jesus' teaching?
 - e. If the four men had had the opportunity to express their desire to Jesus regarding their sick friend, would they have been more likely to ask for healing for him or forgiveness? Why do you say that? If you think they would have asked for healing, then why does Jesus give them what they would not have requested? Is not He being a bit presumptuous?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

After several days He returned to Capernaum. On one of those days the news spread that He was at home, and so many people gathered together that there was soon no longer room for them even about the doorway. He was preaching the word to them. Now as He was teaching, there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting near Him. They had come from every town in Galilee and Judea, even from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was with Him to heal people.

Meanwhile, there came some men bringing to Him a paralytic lying on his pallet which was carried by four men. They were trying to bring him in to lay him down before Jesus. However, finding no way to get near Him on account of the crowd, they went up on the roof. They removed the roof above Him, and when they had dug an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralyzed man lay, down through the tiles into the midst of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, He addressed the paralytic, "Take courage, my son, your sins have been forgiven you."

At this some of the scribes and Pharisees who were sitting there began debating in their minds, saying to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming. Who is this blasphemer? Why is he talking this way? It is blasphemy! For who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Now Jesus, knowing their thoughts, realized in His spirit that they were reasoning in this fashion within themselves, answered them, "Why do you argue this way and think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say to a paralyzed man, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to tell him. Get up, take up your stretcher and begin walking?"

But, to make you know that the Son of man has on earth the right to forgive sins" (He then said to the paralyzed man) "Stand up, I tell you; pick up your pallet and return to your home!"

And immediately he stood up in their presence, took up the pallet he had been lying on, and went out in the sight of them all. He walked home, giving praise to God.

When the crowds saw what had happened, they were afraid, for astonished amazement seized them all. They began praising God who had granted such authority to men. They were filled with awe, saying, "We have never seen anything like this! We have seen wonderful things today!"

SUMMARY

Jesus returned to Capernaum after His first general tour evangelizing Galilee. While teaching, He was the center of immediate attention, especially of investigating committees from all Palestine. Four friends of a paralytic show real ingenuity in placing their friend before Jesus. The Lord took the opportunity to demonstrate His divine prerogative to forgive sin, by showing Himself to possess power that only God could claim. This He did by healing the paralytic.

NOTES

9:2 And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy. The brevity of Matthew here emphasizes the fact that he has sharpened this story down to the barest facts in order to set in sharp contrast just the major points. Mark and Luke, however, add the following details:

1. There were four men who carried the paralytic on a portable mattress or pallet-type bed, easily rolled up and carried over the shoulder.
2. The room in which Jesus sat teaching was packed with people, primarily the Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from many cities. Secondly, other people jammed into all the rest of the available space, blocking all entrance to the house. This concentration of religious leaders around Jesus is probably no accident. This is a "congressional investigation" carried out by these recognized authorities in Israel. Certainly these rabbis had gathered at this time in Capernaum from as far away as Judea and Jerusalem! Considering the distance, we may conclude that they were not merely dropping in on Jesus after a Sunday afternoon

jaunt! They had probably walked the 75-100 miles to be here in Capernaum at this moment. Why? There is a revolution afoot, not only religious but possibly political, for all they knew about it. They were here to hear Jesus and arrive at some definite conclusion about Him: what is the general trend of His doctrine? What of His authority or right to teach? Where is His movement leading? What does He say about himself? For these reasons what occurs on this occasion becomes the more significant. Jesus is literally on trial before the leaders of Israel and He well knows that their report will be circulated throughout the higher echelons of the highest governing body of Judaism. One can not be too careful how he talks before such an august assembly. But observe well how Jesus comports Himself in their presence! Luke (5:17) records that "the power of the Lord was with Him to heal." Is this a simple, general statement, prefacing what is to follow or does this imply that other miracles had been wrought that day prior to the climactic cure of the paralytic? If the former, then it is made abundantly clear by Luke that Jesus' power to work miracles was not at all hindered by the critical disbelief of the opponents present. This incident, along with other similar situations, becomes the best kind of evidence that Jesus' miracles are historic fact, since they were done in the presence of enemies who had everything to gain by successfully disproving the reality of the miracle.

3. The four men, finding they could not enter by usual means, went up on the roof of the house. They either climbed the outside stairway leading to the flat roof, or else they went from roof to roof over the neighboring, contiguous houses until they stood above where Jesus was teaching. Then, by removing the roof tiles, they made an opening just above Jesus through which they lowered their friend into Jesus' presence.

Why did they not simply wait until Jesus' message was over and the crowds dismissed, before they brought their helpless friend to Jesus? These men's hearts were probably so burdened with the real need of their friend, that they were driven by the urgency to seize this precious opportunity to help him. Nothing else is said in the text of the seriousness or urgency of the man's condition, except the hurry of these his friends to take emergency measures to get help for him fast. Was his paralysis of such nature as to lead to heart stoppage and death? If so, it was now or never. Certainly, the one element that caused these men to overcome the practical obstacles, even the objection

that they should have waited until Jesus were free to help them, is their great faith in Jesus Christ as Healer. Such a One as He, could also be merciful about interruptions.

Though Jesus was concentrating all His efforts and attention upon teaching the word to this representative cross-section of His people, He did not regard the interruption, caused by the four men's de-tiling the roof above Him, as an unwelcome intrusion. As the event which follows indicates, He saw it as but the opportunity for perfect confirmation of the authority of His teaching. Also, since the entire event takes place in a private house (for this is the distinct impression given by Mark 2:1, 2), the entire situation was less formal than would be a synagogue service. Thus, the interruption would be less offensive, however unusual the method used by four men to make their need known.

sick of the palsy (*paralytikon*) Luke (5:18) follows better medical terminology, apparently, since he uses the more specific phrase "a man who was paralyzed," whereas the other two call him a **paralytic**. (See Plummer, *Luke, in loc.*) **Lying on a bed**: this oriental bed consisted of perhaps no more than a low mattress upon which the man was carried by his four friends, each one holding up a corner. For lowering the pallet into the presence of Jesus, they may have tied ropes to the four corners.

Jesus, seeing their faith. Mark and Luke tell in detail what hindered these intrepid friends of the paralytic and to what lengths they went to overcome these obstacles. **Jesus saw their faith** and was pleased. Their vivid, detailed planning which they dared execute is more eloquent than words. No great confessions or pious words were uttered. All three Gospel writers unite here in describing their deeds as **their faith**. Jesus apparently spoke first. Either the paralytic had no strength to utter his request for healing or else Jesus gave him no opportunity, his faith being so obvious. He had permitted himself to be laid before Jesus, regardless of the unusual method or the social or physical obstacles they must overcome. **Their faith** cheered Jesus too, because of the contrast to the unbelief and critical prejudices in the scribes and Pharisees in the room with Him.

Jesus . . . said unto the sick of the palsy, Again, Jesus may have spoken first in order to speak, not about the obvious disease of the man, but about forgiveness of sins. Jesus seizes here the initiative, temporarily taken from Him by the interruption caused by the four men's digging through the roof. Dust and small clods of dirt had been falling down on the Pharisees' fine robes and while they were

brushing themselves off, half laughing at the interruption Jesus' followers brought Him, half complaining at the disagreeable soiling of their clothes and warm air in the crowded room, Jesus graciously takes charge of the moment. He knows what He will ultimately do about the paralytic's disease, but He must speak first, before the request for healing is made, lest this cloud the issue He has chosen to bring before the critics in the room; His identity and consequent authority.

Son, or as some Greek texts have it in Mk. 2:5, **My son**, as well as **Man**, (Luke 5:20) all indicate that Jesus is being especially friendly, speaking in this kind, familiar way to the man lying helpless at His feet.

In the article *anthropos*, Arndt and Gingrich, 67, say that "in address *anthrope*, *friend*, indicates a close relationship between the speaker and the one addressed, Lk. 5:20." However it can also have a reproachful connotation, as well as express some familiarity between the one who uses it and the one addressed. (See Lk. 12:14; 22:58, 60.)

Jesus did not hold Himself aloof from sinners, as might the reverend doctors from Jerusalem seated around Him. He dared show his affection for these weak, helpless sinners who came to Him!

Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. Jesus saw more than their faith: He saw also the despair of a guilty conscience facing judgment. He saw the discouragement of an enslaved heart that has learned, through long experience of failure, to take sin for granted. With a gesture of loving tenderness, Jesus dealt with the man's greater need for forgiveness. **Your sins are forgiven.** This was no mere wish or description of some future pardon, but a declaration of fact. Jesus speaks as a kindly Father ("Son") and an acquitting Judge ("your sins are forgiven.") For the moment Jesus turns His full attention on this man, seemingly ignoring the scribes and others around Him, disregarding their attention almost as if it mattered not what they thought, while He took time to encourage and save this lost soul hanging between the hospital and hell. The urgency with which the man was brought suggests that his paralysis was critical and could become fatal if not helped immediately. If so, this man, staring death and judgment in the face, needed pardon before God, even if he were NEVER healed! Jesus gave him both pardon and healing!

Why did Jesus address the man first in relationship to his sins, and not rather regarding the healing of his paralysis? Because a man who is right with God and KNOWS it certainly, can endure all manner

of suffering and waiting. (Consider 2 Cor. 12:5-10) He can even face death calmly, though horribly paralyzed, because he knows that death in God's grace is his final freedom and highest joy. But a man who is merely healed but not forgiven before God does not share this certainty, until he makes it right with God. But why had not Jesus forgiven other people before He healed them prior to this occasion? Why begin here? Why not forgive, then heal, in every case? There had been many other opportunities to say it before now. It is obvious that Jesus has a special purpose at this time and place:

1. Jesus deliberately brought up the question of forgiveness for clarification and teaching. He must communicate the message to men that He has authority on earth to forgive sins. This is as good a time as any to start telling them. But this fact, that He must clarify this doctrine for the scribes, must not obscure the greater truth that He was helping the sinner who had the need.
2. Jesus needed, in the nature of evidence, just such occasions to connect His claims to divine prerogatives with demonstrations that verify His claims as true. He had come to earth, not to work miracles, but to identify Himself as the Forgiver of sins.
3. The fact that Jesus mentioned forgiveness in place of a declaration of the healing of the paralytic must not be taken to mean that Jesus sees a direct and necessary causal connection between one's individual sickness, disease or death, and his personal sins. Even though Jesus declared the man's sins forgiven, he was not immediately healed. A discussion about Jesus' alleged blasphemy intervened before the man was casually released from his paralysis.

However, it is true that in SOME cases diseases are directly attributable to a course of indulgence in certain sins or vicious practices, as for example, intemperate eating and drink, fornication or any other misuse of the body. (See Ro. 1:24-27; I Co. 6:13-18) If this is the case with this paralytic, then Jesus removes whatever fears the paralytic may have had that Jesus would not help so great a sinner. The Lord speaks forgiveness to his soul, a far greater need than mere freedom from his paralysis.

One may well doubt whether the man's paralysis be caused by a consciousness of guilt, even though psychosomatic paralysis is not impossible. One may doubt the psychosomatic connection, since Jesus' argument is based on the evidence presented through a real healing uniquely produced by the instantaneous exercise of the power of God. But, even if the man's paralysis were 100% psychologically based, still the obvious instantaneity of his total

cure, without weeks of consultations and therapy, is miraculous, in the supernatural sense of the word.

And even if all the rabbis in Palestine had taught, as some of them actually did (see citations by Barclay, *Matthew*, I, 334), that there is no sickness without some transgression back of it, is it necessary for Jesus to accommodate Himself to that view, in order to deal with this paralytic whose personal views may have been influenced by that thinking? (Cf. Jn. 9:1-3) While it is true that Jesus dealt with men in their own situation and culture, yet it is not necessary to conceive of Him as leaving men in this belief, if He knew it were not true. While it is true that disease and death are in the world because of sin (Ro. 5:12), yet we err greatly in presuming to describe as sinners everyone whom we find personally afflicted, as if God had smitten them on the basis of the greatness of their sins. If this paralyzed man has been attacked by some malady that is paralyzing him, then there may be no direct connection between his present condition and specific, past sins. A person who is bitten by a poisonous spider or serpent is not morally responsible for the physical results that ensue.

Whatever Jesus' reasons may have been, the scribes' personal views certainly affected their understanding of Jesus' words. Barclay (I, 334) notes:

Rabbi Alexander said, "The sick arises not from his sickness, until his sins are forgiven . . . Rabbi Chija ben Abba said, 'No sick person is cured from sickness, until all his sins are forgiven him.' This unbreakable connection between suffering and sin was part of the orthodox Jewish belief of the time of Jesus. . . . Now remember that these scribes believed that no one could get up and walk unless his sins were forgiven. If Jesus was able to make this man get up and walk, then that was unanswerable proof that the man's sins were forgiven, and that Jesus' claim was true.

9:3 And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, this man blasphemeth. If they had been surprised at the intrusion, and disgusted by the discomfort of dust falling down into the room around them, and contemptuous at Jesus' common familiarity with the paralytic, this is all forgotten in the greater shock caused by Jesus' claim to forgive sins. Not only is this a surprise to the Jewish scholars present, since the Mosaic law of pardon was then in vigor. But this would surprise Jesus' closest disciples also, since this is apparently the first of very few times in Jesus' personal ministry when

He pronounced a person forgiven. (See Lk. 7:48; 23:43). We moderns can share this sense of shock only to the extent that we have learned to feel deeply the horror for and heinousness of blasphemy. This depends upon the depth of our jealousy for God's honor. But Jesus' purpose for risking this jolting of the conscience of all present is clear and necessary (9:6a). Jesus could have eased tensions by simply healing the man without a word about forgiveness. The oppositions and anger He aroused might have been avoided. But Jesus must reveal the astounding truth that the whole human race has Someone who understands them perfectly, whose perfect life condemns all their sins, but whose divine prerogatives qualify Him to bring forgiveness and righteousness to all who trust Him. This is truth in which not only that generation was interested, but which all honest men have longed to hear. And, best of all, Jesus announced this truth "in the presence of those most interested in exposing it, if false, and most able to explode it, had it not been true. Whether His words were truth or blasphemy, was the controversy between Christ and the rulers from that day to the end of His Ministry, Mt. 26:65." (McGarvey *Fourfold Gospel*, 186)

The scribes said within themselves. See on 9:4

This man blasphemeth. This secret declaration of their consciences signalled the beginning of the scribes' hostility and opposition to Jesus. The criticisms developed into open confrontations in five specific areas:

1. Alleged blasphemy: here
2. Having common fellowship with people with whom no self-respecting rabbi would ever be found: (Mt. 9:11; Lk. 7:36-50)
3. Neglect of traditional religion with its ascetic practices, such as the ablutions (Mt. 15:1-20); the fasts (Mt. 9:14-17)
4. Violation of the sabbath: (Jn. 5:15-18; Mt. 12:1-14)
5. Being in league with Satan: (Mt. 9:34; 12:22-45)

Although from a Jewish standpoint, all these charges were serious enough, it was this charge of blasphemy for which they crucified the Lord. (See Mt. 26:63-66)

There are two means of blasphemy: direct, by which one calls God unjust or unholy, or disparages anything that speaks of the sovereign majesty of God; or indirect, by which one holds anything or anyone as equal with God, hence, placing oneself in the place of God, or assuming any of His unique prerogatives. Thus, Jesus deserved to die, if He were not the very incarnation of God Himself! The Jews were right in their attack. Their horror in the presence of this apparently common human being, who lays claim to one of God's unique

rights, is proper. But when they refuse the evidence that He IS the Son of God, then THEY become the blasphemers. But their horror was not so innocent as it may seem at first glance. Their contempt is unwarranted, since all Jesus' other miracles should have identified Him to them as possessing this right without further proof. **This man**, on the lips of these accusers, is decidedly emphatic: "Who does this guy think He is anyway?" (Cf. Lk. 4:22; 7:39, 49; 9:9; 14:30; 15:2; Jn. 9:33 for other emphatic uses of *hoútos*, "this one, this fellow, this man.")

The Pharisees arrived at this conclusion through a syllogism perhaps similar to this one:

Major Premise: "No man can forgive sins but God alone."

Minor Premise: "But Jesus of Nazareth is not God in any sense."

Conclusion: "Therefore, Jesus is blaspheming God in arrogating to himself authority to forgive sins, a prerogative which is God's alone."

Their major premise is a right principle. (Isa. 43:25; 44:22 etc.) The fundamental question lay in the minor premise: is Jesus God in any sense that affects the truth of His claim to forgive sins? For the correction of this false conclusion drawn by the Jews, see on 9:5, where Jesus' argument shows the fallacy of their minor premise and conclusion.

9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said. Several factors combine to lead us to the unshakeable conviction that Jesus supernaturally perceived the content of their mind. While the probability is great that anyone could have read the minds of these scribes, given the knowledge of their views on blasphemy and the overt expressions on their face and perhaps the tearing of their garments, yet the capacity to divulge with unerring accuracy what had not been said is an obvious miracle of omniscience. At first view Luke (5:21) gives the impression that at least some of the scribes expressed their thoughts openly in words, which are, in fact, reported by all three Evangelists. Or is Luke's expression to be interpreted in light of the supposedly fuller statements reported by the other two? This is the case here, for, as Plummer (*Luke*, 155) demonstrates, *légontes*, "saying," may be used of thoughts, even when not uttered. (See Lk. 12:17; Mt. 21:25) So, if we conclude that the scribes said nothing about what was going on in their minds, although they were deeply agitated, this event identifies Jesus as God who knows men's hearts, come in the flesh. (Cf. I Sam. 16:7; I Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 6:30; Ezek. 11:5; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24; Rev. 2:23; Jn. 2:24, 25) While Jesus did not here directly claim

omniscience, yet he challenged their thoughts with such pointed reference to them, that had this not been the direction of their thoughts, the scribes could have objected to Jesus' misrepresentation of their reaction to His words. No such objection is recorded. Rather:

1. Matthew and Mark describes the objectors as "saying to themselves" or "questioning in their hearts."
2. All three Evangelists picture Jesus as "knowing their thoughts," or "as perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves," or "perceiving their questionings."
3. Jesus did locate openly the place where their evil thoughts and questionings arose: "in your hearts," a fact cited by all three Gospel writers.

This power to pronounce with certainty the hidden, innermost thoughts of the human mind, qualifies Jesus as the perfect Judge, not only of the Pharisees and scribes whose hearts He has just laid bare before them all, but He, as Judge, can acquit the paralytic too!

Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? The scribes' conclusion was not illogical, granted the premises. But they refused to admit the evidence which would have corrected their minor premise and led them to a different conclusion. Their reasoning was evil, not merely faulty or incorrect, since it was produced by hearts bent upon rejecting evidence, bent upon destroying Jesus. Jesus' question, therefore, challenges the motivations and purposes behind their rejection of His deity. These hidden reasons for their objections were morally indefensible. And their objections lay in their own pre-conceived notions about what God's Messiah had to be like. The evil lay in adhering to these prejudices rather than follow the clear evidence He had so faithfully and continuously presented of His divine right.

Note that Jesus does not object to the right principle upon which the theologians state their case. He respected their zeal for God's honor, by claiming to forgive sins, not in His right but upon God's authority. He tacitly admits that they are right in affirming that anyone who would presume to forgive sins on his own authority would be guilty of blasphemy. As we follow Jesus' method of argument, we see that if He had claimed to forgive this man's sins, without God's authority to do so, He Himself would be what they had claimed, a blasphemer. The fact that He virtually accepts their way of stating the case, makes His further declarations and proof of His right so much stronger.

9:5 For which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and walk? The twice repeated expression

to say, is the key to Jesus' meaning. Even though Jesus asks which is **easier** to claim, His obvious intention is to place both claims on the same level, because both statements are ridiculous claims for the man who can do neither. Both claims demand the identical power and authority of God, before either can be seriously meant. Jesus is not asking which is the easier to do, but which is easier to claim. Naturally, the **easier to claim** is to forgive sins, for none can examine any external, visible evidence that proves it. But to claim to heal a paralytic is capable of visible, immediate verification. It is here that the real test of Jesus' authority will lie, if He can demonstrate through this latter claim that He is God and possesses therefore the proper and personal authority to forgive sins. This He proceeds to do, because, even though He has proven it over and over again, Jesus would not ask these present to believe without evidence. They must have a rational ground on which to rest their faith in His word. Though they have more than enough evidence to convince the honest heart, mercifully Jesus gives them more. But this is not simply more evidence, since it is inextricably linked with His majestic claim to forgive sins here on earth.

9:6 **But that you may know**, i.e. with the specific purpose of making my authority clear and obvious to you. Here Jesus draws the direct, immediate connection between His works and His claims. (See Jn. 10:38; 14:10, 11) **that the Son of man** (See Notes on 8:20) This use of this title by Jesus forms the conclusive proof that Jesus does not intend thereby to identify Himself with mankind, in the sense of making the title equivalent to "man" or "Everyman," as opposed to "Son of God." The authority to forgive sins does not belong to men. Jesus uses this title in its true Messianic sense, determined from Daniel (7:13, 14). For fuller notes on "Son of man," see also Plummer (*Luke*, 156, 157).

But that you may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. Jesus establishes hereby His entire claim to the possession of personal authority to forgive sins on the reality of this miracle. In effect, He was saying to His critics: "You presume that it is a safe, easy thing for me to pretend that I can forgive sins, since no one on earth can verify whether, when I address this paralytic, saying, 'Your sins are forgiven,' they are actually pardoned or not. So, let me provide you a test that you can verify. You know that only a person possessing God's full authority could say to this paralyzed man, 'Rise and walk,' with the result that he be actually healed, in exactly the same way

that it really demands God's authority to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' with the result that he has the certainty that God really has forgiven him. Now, if a physical cure of his paralysis takes place when I say to him, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home, then you can be certain that when I say to him, 'Your sins have been pardoned,' his forgiveness is a reality. In which case, of course, I am not guilty of blasphemy, as you charge. On the contrary, my high claim to God's authority shall be vindicated."

The logic of Jesus' argument may be stated like this:

Major Premise (tacitly): "No man but God can heal paralysis with a word of power."

Minor Premise (demonstration): "But I have power on earth to heal paralysis with a word of power."

Conclusion: "I possess on earth the authority of God to heal paralysis."

This conclusion becomes the minor premise of further argument:

Major Premise: "None can forgive sins but God alone."

Minor Premise: "But I have shown that I possess God's authority."

Conclusion: "Therefore, I have power on earth to forgive sins."

Or, the alternative, implicit reasoning arrives at the same conclusion:

Major Premise: "Only those who pretend to divine prerogative without right or authority are guilty of blasphemy."

Minor Premise: "But Jesus has demonstrated by this miracle that He does possess the proper right or authority to exercise divine prerogatives."

Conclusion: "Therefore, Jesus is not guilty of Blasphemy."

Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. There could be no bolder challenge than this. It is at this point that Jesus' claim to the right to exercise divine prerogatives stands or falls. If the paralytic can do what Jesus says, then his forgiveness is real. Jesus healed the man, not merely because He was anxious to vindicate Himself, but out of great tenderness and mercy He felt for the man's need. Instantly He healed him, that the people might have the required evidence upon which they could base their trust in Him.

9:7 **And he arose, and departed to his house.** That settles the question. One fact is worth more than a thousand theories. Luke (5:25) reports the man as arising immediately on the presence of the people. Then he probably rolled up his pallet and walked through the amazed crowd. The point to be noticed is that Jesus knew with

unerring certainty exactly what would happen before anything took place. In one sense He was taking no chances, for with divine foresight He could see the paralyzed man arising even before He forgave him. But from a strictly human point of view, Jesus had taken an awful chance of losing everything He had won! Who but Jesus could have had the necessary knowledge? Who but Jesus could have had the power demanded to heal the paralytic? Who else could have given the required proof of His identity?

Whereas the man's friends could not even carry him into the house due to the crowd jammed into the doorways, now the astounded people open the way for him to leave. Luke (5:25) reports that this grateful ex-paralytic walked out glorifying God. Whereas the scribes had accused Jesus of blasphemy, this man had nothing but praise for God. Had he understood the connection between Jesus and God? Whatever he may have understood, his exuberant example of rejoicing and praise was contagious.

9:8 But when the multitudes saw it, they were afraid, and glorified God, who had given such authority unto men.

This mixed reaction stands in perfect harmony with human nature and is psychologically sound, since these people felt their own sinfulness in the almost touchable presence of God. They knew they were standing in that no-man's land, that twilight zone between the natural world and the supernatural. They knew that this earth had just been invaded from outer space where they supposed God dwells. And they recognized the Invader as God, and they feared. Yet the joyful surprise and marvel of the seemingly impossible healing drew out of them this glorifying praise for the God they feared so near. They had heard Jesus pronounce that word which the honest heart of sinful mankind longs to hear more than any other. They had not believed Him. Rather they had concluded that He had blasphemed, saying something incapable of proving. They had questioned His right to say something they could not accept as truth. Now they had to reckon with the shock of truth breaking into their personality: they could not deny its reality without denying the dependability of their own senses with which they observed it. In response to this manifestation of God's presence seen among them, **they glorified God.** (Compare similar experiences of the Jews on mount Carmel as the fire fell from heaven after Elijah's prayer, I Kgs. 18:36-39, and Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch of fish with his own nets and boat, Lk. 5:8.)

They glorified God, saying in their amazement and awe, "We never saw anything like this—we have seen strange things today!" (Mk.

2:12; Lk. 5:26) They had seen things transcending ordinary human experience and reason: sins forgiven, omniscience and healing of paralysis. But they had also seen the greatest difference between Christ's religion and the message of all other isms: while all other philosophies glorify and save the fittest through survival of all natural forces or through perserverence in progression through an infinite number of stages or steps or through the endless accumulation of an undefined number of merits or, to sum them all up, while all other systems "save" the powerful, the good and the worthy, the greater glory of Jesus' mission lay in His stooping to concentrate divine attention upon the lowly, the sinful, the poor, the weak, the damned. He brought forgiveness within reach of all. And this miracle proved it! The crowd is convinced that the charge has been disproved and that Jesus is acting with the full authority of God. What effect this miracle produced in the theologians present is not mentioned in the text, but it may be suggested from their growing opposition on later occasions that they remained unconvinced.

God who had given such authority unto men. Though Matthew does not cite the words of the crowd directly, it is probable that he is quoting the content of their praise, even as Mark and Luke cite directly their words: McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 82) well says: "It was to the **man**, Jesus, that the power was given, and to **men** only as He was contemplated as one of the race." These people were honest enough to admit that God had actually granted such authority to Jesus. His claim was vindicated in their eyes.

What does this miracle prove about Jesus? It proves that Jesus has the right to speak with all the authority of God. It means that He can be relied upon to speak authoritatively the message of God. It means that we must accept Jesus' word provided by this miracle and we do not need to ask for more miracles to back up everything else He may affirm. It means that we may be 100% certain that what we had asked of God, i.e. forgiveness, we may now ask of Jesus of Nazareth, for He is God come in person to tell us that He is the real Ruler who is able to present us without spot or blemish before God, forgiven, pardoned, cleansed, fit for fellowship with God.

COMPARE

For a similar case which touches this narrative at several points, see the healing of the paralytic in Jerusalem. (Jn. 5:1ff.) Edersheim (*Life*, I, 500) suggests the following interesting points of similarity:

1. "The unspoken charge of the Scribes, that in forgiving sins

Jesus blasphemed by making Himself equal with God, has its exact counterpart in the similar charge against Him in St. John 5:18, which kindled in them the wish to kill Jesus;

2. "as in that case the final reply of Jesus pointed to 'the authority' (*exousia*) which the Father had given Him for Divine administration on earth, (Jn. 5:27), so the healing of the paralytic was to show the Scribes that He had 'authority' (*exousia*) for the dispensation upon earth of the forgiveness of sins, which the Jews rightly regarded as a Divine prerogative.
3. "the words which Jesus spake to the paralytic . . . are to the very letter the same . . ."
4. "alike in the words which Jesus addressed to the Scribes at the healing of the paralytic, and in those at the Unknown Feast, He made final appeal to His works as evidential of His being sent by, and having received of, the Father 'the authority' to which He laid claim." (Jn. 5:36; cf. Mk. 2:10)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Locate this incident in the chronological history given by Mark and Luke. When did this miracle occur during Jesus ministry?
2. Identify the city meant by Matthew when he used the cryptic expression "His own city." Prove your answer.
3. Describe the situation on this occasion, borrowing materials from Mark and Luke, which give clarity to the situation here narrated by Matthew. In other words, explain why it was necessary for the four men to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus in the exact manner they used.
4. What more important need did this man have than the cure of his paralysis?
5. State the evidences of Jesus' deity expressed in this passage.
6. What kind of bed did the four men hoist up on the roof? How did they manage to get the friend into the presence of Jesus? What was hindering them?
7. Is there any evidence in the narratives of this miracle that the paralytic himself expressed any faith in Jesus? If so, what is the evidence?
8. What did Jesus see, when, as the Gospel writers put it, "He saw their faith"? What was visible about so invisible a quality as faith?
9. What was the effect of the miracle on the crowds present?
10. State the response of Jesus to the expression of faith on the part

of the four men who had brought their friend. What did Jesus actually say?

11. What was the response made by the Pharisees and theologians to Jesus' declaration? Express the principles behind their assertions about Jesus' declaration. Though you may disallow their application to Jesus, justify their conclusion when applied to anyone else who said what Jesus said. Quote Jesus' answer to their complaint.
12. Show the conclusiveness of Jesus' rebuttal of the theologians' conclusion. Explain the relationship between what Jesus said and the miracle He performed in the presence of these people.
13. What did Jesus mean by the expression: "authority on earth to forgive sins"?
14. Explain why these "reverend doctors from Jerusalem" were even present on this occasion. What was their special interest in Jesus' message and ministry?
15. What kind of roof do Mark and Luke describe the house as having, wherein Jesus sat with the crowd of people? What does this fact have to do with the event itself?

Section 19

JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI

(Parallels: Mark 2:13-22; Luke 5:27-39)

TEXT: 9:9-17

9. And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.
10. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.
11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?
12. But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.
13. But go ye and learn what *this* meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.
14. Then come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?
15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber

mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast.

16. And no man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.
17. Neither do *men* put new wine into old wine-skins: else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. We all know how important it is to choose our friends with care. The more important the person, the more care he must exercise in the selection of his friends. On what possible basis, then, how can Jesus be justified for being intimate with the riff-raff of Jewish society? A man is known by the company he keeps. Yet, ironically, how does this very fact identify Jesus as the finest of men ever known?
- b. Why do you think Jesus chose to call such a man as Matthew to be an Apostle? Would not He have run too great a risk to call a publican?
- c. How is it possible for Hosea to declare that God did not really care for sacrifices, since it was mercy He wanted? After all, had not God originally ordered that the sacrifices be given? What could Hosea mean that reflects not only God's original command but also the true purpose behind the law of sacrifice?
- d. Do you feel that Jesus' hobnobbing with sinners justifies a man in seeking bad company? In what way would he be right in so doing?
- e. Can you give a possible reason why the Pharisees and legal experts were on the scene when Jesus went to the dinner party with Matthew? Had they been invited too?
- f. Paul says (Romans 3:10-18, 23) that there are none who are righteous and that all are sinners. Who, then, are those whom Jesus describes as "righteous"? Are there some "righteous" persons on earth whom Jesus did not need to call to repentance?
- g. Do you think the disciples of John the Baptist were criticizing Jesus? On what basis?
- h. What effect would Jesus' cryptic declaration have on the Apostles when He said, "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast"?

- i. Do you think that we too should fast? Why? Under what circumstances.
- j. Does it not seem to you that the call of Matthew to follow Jesus was a little abrupt? On what basis is it possible to comprehend Matthew's instant, deliberate response?
- k. Why would Matthew invite Jesus to the dinner party in his own house?
- l. Why would Matthew have invited also all his old cronies, when he knew that the pure Jesus of Nazareth would be there? What possible purpose could he have for making this social blunder? Or was it a blunder?
- m. If you decide that fasting is something a follower of Jesus can do today, do you feel that fasting is a ceremony to be observed regularly, or should the circumstances in which you find yourself determine your choice?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus was passing on away from the seashore where He had taught the gathered crowd, He saw a man, a tax collector, named Matthew Levi, son of Alphaeus. Matthew was busy at the tax office, but Jesus invited him, "Come, be my disciple."

Matthew left the whole business, stood up and went along with Jesus.

Later, Matthew made Him a large banquet in his home. While the Lord was at his house as dinner guest, there was a large number of Matthew's old cronies, sinners and other people who came as guests. They all sat down with Jesus and His followers, for there was also a large group who came with Him.

Now when the Pharisees and their legal experts saw that Jesus sat there enjoying dinner with such notorious sinners, they murmured against Jesus' disciples, "How can you and your rabbi enjoy the fellowship of such scum?"

When Jesus heard what they were saying, He argued: "People who are well do not need a doctor, just sick folk do. You go study what this Bible text means (Hosea 6:6): "It is not just your sacrifices that I want—I want you to learn to be merciful! And besides, why should I spend my time trying to get the 'righteous' to turn from their sins? It is the SINNERS who need my help!"

Now the disciples of John the Baptist as well as the Pharisees fasted regularly each week. So the disciples of John approached Jesus with the query: "Why do we regularly go without food to spend time in

prayer? The Pharisees and their disciples do it too. But your followers, what do they do? They wine and dine!"

Then Jesus responded like this, "You cannot make the wedding guests go without food or be sad during the wedding festivities, can you? No, with the bridegroom present, it would be out of place for that. The time will arrive when the groom will be taken away from them. Then it would be appropriate for them to refuse to eat."

He illustrated His point with this parable: "Who would tear a piece from a new suit of clothes and sew it on a worn-out garment? If he does, he will tear the new material, and the new piece would not match the old anyway. In a similar way, no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, because if he does, the new patch rips away from the old cloth and you have a bigger hole than before.

"Neither should you store freshly pressed grape juice in old goat-skin bottles. If you do, the pressure of the expanding new wine will burst the skins. The wine gets spilled and so is lost and you have destroyed the skin bottles too. No, new wine must be stored in new, flexible wineskins. That way, both are preserved.

"No one who is accustomed to drinking vintage wines calls for this year's wine. 'The old,' he claims, 'is pleasant; it suits me.'"

SUMMARY

Leaving the seashore where He had been teaching the multitudes, Jesus passed by Matthew-Levi's tax office and called him to intimate discipleship. Matthew, in turn, responded joyfully by giving a huge farewell dinner party for his former associates. Jesus' friendly fellowship with this level of society aroused the criticism of the Jewish Puritans, the Pharisees, but Jesus defended His ministry among such sinners as absolutely essential.

The disciples of John the Baptist too were scandalized that Jesus and His followers paid little of any attention to the traditional fasting practices. Again Jesus defended His practice and views as being so new and different in nature from the old system that John's disciples hoped to purify, that one would do violence to both systems to try to mix them. Jesus concluded by warning them about being prejudiced against the new ideas by thinking the old ways to be better.

NOTES

A. THE CALL OF MATTHEW

This account of the call of Matthew to close companionship with Jesus, following as it does upon the foregoing account of Jesus' divine

right on earth to forgive sins, is in its proper logical place. Jesus' call of him who, in the minds of popular Judaism, was a most flagrant sinner, is a thrilling exercise of Jesus' power to forgive sins and transform a man.

9:9 And as Jesus passed by from thence . . . Between the astounding narration of Jesus' proven ability to forgive sins on earth, demonstrated by His instantaneous cure of the paralytic lowered through the roof, and this record of Matthew's call, Mark (2:13) and Luke (5:27a) both report that Jesus left the crowded house in which that cure occurred. Perhaps it was precisely because of the pressing crowds that He went outdoors, in order to have more space. As He had done on other occasions, He led the people to the Capernaum wharf, where He could speak to them all with greater facility. Apparently, when Jesus had finished His discourse before these people, He dismissed them and walked directly toward the toll office of Matthew.

He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll. This could be the most beautiful sentence in the New Testament and the most incredible declaration in all of Jewish literature! Jesus, the mover of multitudes, could see the individual, Matthew. Levi was no mere number to the Lord, no "warm body" whose living personality could be ignored. How many times had thousands of other Jews passed by that same toll office without ever seeing this human being called Matthew sitting there? How often had their own awareness of his hated occupation caused them to shun him deliberately, turning their head the other way, pretending not to have seen him? But Jesus saw Matthew as he was and loved him. We too must learn to see people, not for the clothes they wear, the position they occupy, the relationships they represent to us. This latter only hides the individuality of that person. We must see the man or woman as human beings in need of God. We must see, as Jesus saw Matthew, the individual possibilities they have to grow into the image of God. Jesus was not afraid that the moral filth and contamination, of which the Pharisees were so afraid, would cause Him to lose His own purity. Nor should we withhold help for fear of contamination from those to whom Jesus felt irresistibly drawn. Jesus was not deceived by a contact with Matthew elsewhere, for He saw Matthew precisely as he was, engaged in his universally despised occupation.

Sitting at the place of toll. For detailed bibliographies on *publicans place of toll, etc.*, see encyclopedic articles and special studies, especially Edersheim, *Sketches*, 51ff.; *Life*, I, 515-517; *ISBE*, 2920a, b, 2921a,

Arndt-Gingrich, 820 on *telōnēs*. The official position of the tax official in Jewish social life, regardless of the education, wealth or power of the individual who exercised that office, was despicable beyond belief for those unaware of the peculiar religio-political situation that existed in Palestine during this period. Religiously, the Jews owned no king but God and to Him alone should they bring proper tribute. (Though for convenience' sake, they acted otherwise more often than not, as for example, Jn. 19:15; yet their religious ideal was this.) Politically, they were a small political unit of the Roman empire to which they owed tribute, custom, and duty. Although in a period previous to the Roman imperial era, the taxes were collected by wealthy men who purchased from the Greek kings the right to collect them (see, for example Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII, 4, 1-4), under the empire "the direct taxes were not farmed out, but collected by regular imperial officers in the regular routine of official duty. The customs or tolls levied upon exports and imports, and upon goods passing through the country, were sold to the highest bidders, who were called 'publicans'" (*ISBE*, 2920b). Even though the publicans themselves were apparently not Roman officials, they possessed all the authority of Rome behind their exactions. As a Jew, the publican was viewed as a traitor to his nation and to God, because of his willingness to collaborate in this way with a pagan, foreign conqueror. Worse still, the Roman system encouraged greed and graft by selling the right to collect taxes at auction, from which the publican repaid himself for his work and risk involved by collecting all he could. The tax collectors naturally enriched themselves at the expense of their own nation. The indefinite rate of taxation plus the exaggerated and arbitrary value placed upon goods by the publicans rendered their position indescribably odious to all other Jews.

Scripture notices of the publicans reveal in passing in what light they were considered in Jesus' time: they were typically selfish (Mt. 5:46, 47). They were classed on a par with heathens (Mt. 18:17), prostitutes (Mt. 21:31) and other notorious outcasts (Mt. 9:10, 11:19; Lk. 18:11). Even though Jesus Himself viewed them as people to be loved and saved, yet His use of popular language in regard to the publicans reveals profoundly in what light they were viewed by the majority of the people before whom Jesus used this language.

And He saith unto him, Follow me. Matthew knew that Jesus could have found plenty of other, respectable men who had no

embarrassing past to live down. Jesus could have eased tensions between Himself and the "orthodox" by selecting His disciples more discreetly. By Pharisaic principles, Jesus should have prudently passed right on past Matthew, but He chose not to. These two words of invitation are Jesus' deliberate demonstration of His determination to show what He could do with a man completely surrendered to Him, regardless of background or lack of previous religious virtue. Jesus intended to take this dull, rough, crude, sinful man and help him to be transformed into His own image. Jesus could see Matthew as he could become, so invited him to follow. Jesus could see in Matthew more than Matthew himself dared dream; because He was seeing "the possibilities in personality." Jesus knew the man that Levi might become, quite as well as the man Levi already was. It was Jesus' unshakeable faith in the better Matthew that became the power to make Matthew die to be that better man! He was literally calling this man to greatness. The tragic question that renders them the more guilty is how many times had Jesus offered the same invitation to the Pharisees?

And he arose and followed Him. This was the vital difference between Matthew and the Pharisees: he could properly evaluate this invitation. He responded differently from the Pharisees precisely because he was a different man. He had endured hate from his fellow Jews for years. He knew that he had sold out to the Romans for this well-paying job, but all he had earned in human relations, of which are made the real treasure of life, was the contempt and snubbing of his own people. He had felt the power of greed, cruelty, gouging and cheating in his own heart. Sick of soul, Matthew does not surprise us by responding this way. And yet, Matthew's own will could have hindered all that followed this moment, for, as Morgan (*Matthew*, 92) points out, Jesus could offer the highest invitation of heaven, but He stood limited before the surprising reality that a man can say, No.

Matthew could gratefully appreciate how much it cost Jesus to involve Himself with such as Matthew. But this publican had never witnessed a man sacrifice his reputation like this before. This customs agent could never have dared hope for such personal recognition, much less could he hope to be called to personal companionship with Jesus and Apostleship! How long had he been a secret admirer of the Prophet from Nazareth?

One interesting problem is noted and adequately handled by Bruce (*Training*, 22), i.e. why and how Matthew should respond to Jesus' invitation so promptly without any apparent or at least recorded psychological preparation. The Gospels

give the impression of abruptness surrounding Matthew's call, as if Matthew had not known Jesus quite well previously. Two factors combine to suggest very strongly that this acquaintance actually existed:

1. The call of other Apostles is surrounded by the same sort of abruptness, whereas we know that several of them had been previously acquainted with Jesus. (See on 4:18-22) As Bruce (*op cit.*) notes, "The truth is that, in regard to both calls, the evangelists concerned themselves only about the *crisis*, passing over in silence all preparatory stages, and not deeming it necessary to inform intelligent readers that, of course, neither the publican nor any other disciple blindly followed one of whom he knew nothing, merely because asked or commanded to follow."

2. Considering Jesus' close connection with the city of Capernaum, His mighty works done and repeated before a grateful and at first, responsive populace, and remembering that Matthew probably lived and worked in Capernaum, we conclude that Jesus and Matthew had been fellow-citizens of Capernaum and could well have known each other. It would have been more psychologically improbable to believe that Matthew had never heard of Him. (See on Mt. 11:23).

Had he had business relationships with the fishermen and shipowners among the Apostles? Had he been watching the growing opposition to Jesus' ministry? Or had he failed to notice the fact that Jesus seemed always to be surrounded by common sinners like himself? Could not this fact have encouraged Levi to leave his table on various occasions to slip in at the back of the crowds to hear Jesus personally? But when Jesus came right up to his table, placed before him this invitation to destiny, it took not even a moment's deliberation to make that decision that forever sealed his future and gave to the world Jesus' first publican-Apostle. As Edersheim paints him, "His soul was in the speechless surprise of unexpected love and grace; but he rose up, left the custom-house and followed Him!"

And he arose and followed, The significant omission of the word "immediately" allows us to surmise that Matthew first settled his accounts, closed out his books and turned over his responsibilities to others. His good rapport with publicans later indicates that he did not leave them embarrassed by his absence. While he may well

have concluded his work to leave all to follow Jesus, why did he rise up to readily?

1. Was it because he still retained influences of a godly upbringing? Is his deep knowledge and use of the Old Testament shown later in his Gospel, only the result of supernatural inspiration, or was it the result of a proper godly training, from which he in mid-life badly strayed in search of wealth?
2. Or was he reflecting a deep, personal dissatisfaction with a life, which from its beginning had been empty, shallow, hopeless? Had he realized the depth of his desperate condition as a sinner, depicted so well by Barker (*As Matthew Saw the Master*, 41)? "The broken intentions, the wasted dreams, the splintered personality, the poisoned mind, and the calloused heart—it added up to a loathesome, hopeless case."
3. Was Matthew simply a better man than the average publican?

Whatever his preparation to be called by Jesus, Matthew responded, leaving a comfortable job and the security of a good income for a life of destiny, adventure, peace and joy. His talent was turned to serve in composing one of the most extensive records of Jesus' teaching ministry that has ever come down to us.

B. THE CONCERN OF MATTHEW

9:10 **And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house . . .** Modestly, Matthew omits details that would glorify himself, reserving himself only to the barest facts. However, Mark and Luke describe the arrangements Matthew prepared in his own house:

1. Levi made "a great feast" (Lk. 5:29), such as one would expect a former publican, probably wealthy, to be able to give. Nothing is spared to make this moment a memorable occasion for all who hear of it.
2. Levi made "Him" a great feast: Luke is affirming (5:29) that Matthew arranged this banquet for Jesus Himself, in His honor.
3. All Synoptic writers agree in the large number of guests, not only Jesus and many disciples that followed Him (Mk. 2:15), but also "a large company of tax collectors and others" (Lk. 5:29).

Notice the elaborate plans carried out by this one repentant publican. His conversion must have caused quite a sensation in Capernaum! After all, here is a wealthy but notorious publican suddenly called

away from his occupation to leave everything to enter the companionship of the most truly holy Rabbi people in Capernaum had ever known. All who heard about it would wonder not only at the readiness of Levi's response and the completeness of his change, but also the purpose behind Jesus' unusual choice.

Apparently Matthew planned this feast with the specific purpose of introducing Jesus to all his former associates. He cared enough to invite all his old cronies to a feast where the issue of his own former life and present association could be faced head-on. Certainly Matthew invited his friends to the feast: who else COULD he invite? This is the reason the guest-list contained so many publicans' names. But why, in re-telling his story, does Matthew use this particular expression: **many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus?** Is this a fixed phrase in popular Jewish speech, or is he writing with tongue in cheek, preparing the mind of the reader for the hypocritical question of the Pharisees which follows? Or, by saying, **publicans and sinners**, is he revealing the purpose of his own heart? The men he invited are sinners like himself. This former lover of gain has begun to act like his Lord; he has become a lover of souls, immediately doing all he can to bring his fellow sinners under the influence of Jesus' voice.

It took great insight on Matthew's part to have been able to plan in precisely this way, knowing surely that he could bring his friends to Jesus in this way that would be perfectly in harmony with Jesus' character. C. E. B. Reed comments: (*Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*, XXII, 224)

One can see that Matthew had already studied to good purpose his Lord's character.

- I. First of all he perceived that he could best serve Him, not by eating and drinking alone in His presence, but by inviting the outcasts of society and befriending them for the sake of Him who made their cause His own.
- II. He invited to the feast his own associates. Many men would have forsworn the class from which they had been called and sought some new field of benevolence; whereas he does not disown his publican comrades, but selects them as earliest recipients of his bounty.
- III. He recognized that the best thing he could do for them was to bring them into contact with Jesus. Instead of going among them and talking about his new Master, he

wisely brought them face to face with Him whose teaching he could not match for breadth or power.

- IV. This intercourse between Christ and the publicans Matthew contrived to bring about by means of an entertainment. He knew well that most of them would never come to hear a formal discourse from the Lord, but that meat and drink would open their hearts to receive the scattered seeds of His teaching . . .

Note that Matthew's call to become Jesus' personal disciple had not turned his head. He could still see his old friends. He was still interested in them, still loved them, though he had made a definite break with his old life among them. See how he reflects that new love from Him who loved Matthew as no other! Is not this repentance at its best?

C. THE CRITICISM OF MATTHEW'S MASTER

9:11 **And when the Pharisees saw it.** What were THEY doing there? It is not too likely that they had come to the feast of publicans in order to take part! Storm clouds of opposition to Jesus' ministry had already begun to form, because Jesus had already begun to succeed at the very business He had come to earth to do. These critics would never have bothered criticizing Him, were He not making real headway. His was a movement that was going somewhere—it was alive. Nobody bothers to criticize something that is all but dead. Nor were they particularly interested in Matthew, one of the "sinners" with whom Jesus ate. What these eagle-eyed censors were after was Jesus. Matthew could have eaten with all the sinners in town and no one would have noticed. But when Jesus of Nazareth is willing to risk His reputation for Matthew by eating with him, these Pharisees attack.

It is not necessary to suppose that these Pharisees who see this spectacle of a Rabbi among publicans are theologians only, although Mark and Luke both affirm that there were theologians present. The "fraternity of the Pharisees" included people from all walks of life, (See Edersheim, *Sketches*, 226ff.) some of whom may have seen Jesus and His followers enter the publican's house. They may have then reported the incident to "their scribes" (Mk. 2:16; Lk. 5:30) who, reinforcing those first on the scene, now begin to complain.

They said unto His disciples. Notice the sheer cunning in this approach made to Jesus' disciples, although the cunning might be motivated by moral cowardice, or that fear to face Jesus directly.

These theological lawyers, instead of introducing some deep, debatable theological objection to Jesus, try to shake the disciples' confidence in Him by showing how their Master violates acknowledged Jewish propriety. If they succeed in undermining Jesus' influence by demonstrating that, while in theory He may mean well, yet in practice He fails at a critical point, then is His ministry ruined.

Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners? This question has perhaps less point for us westerners than it would for an oriental to whom a meal was a sacred matter. (Remember how Peter too violated this Jewish taboo by eating with Gentiles, Acts 11:2, 3) To break bread together pledged each to solemn friendship and mutual help. Consequently, self-respecting people eat only with other respectable people with whom they wish to associate. Thus would these accusers inculcate Jesus through guilt by association, making the false assumption: "You are known by the company you keep!" Thus they would insinuate that Jesus was of like character. It was as if they were asking, "What kind of God does He think He represents, keeping company with scum like that? He is unable to discern their character perhaps, in which case He disqualifies Himself to be a proper rabbi!" Any way the statement is phrased, their complaint shows no obvious love for these lost ones. Their merciless self-righteousness had shut their heart and frozen their concern for those who need God so desperately.

As Edersheim teaches, (*Life*, I, 507), this text highlights the fundamental distinction between Christianity and all other religions, especially Rabbinism, since all other religions must stand confessedly helpless regarding the positive forgiveness of sins and welcome for the sinner. They have nothing to say in contrast to the personal, merciful approach of God in Jesus Christ to the sinner, welcoming him back to repentance. This welcome produces repentance like no other stimulus in other religions could ever do. The burdened soul struggling toward God finds the answer of Jesus convincing and helpful like no other. Worse yet, the very title "Pharisee," or "separated one," underlined the very character of Rabbinism, even of Sadducees too in this respect, since the goal of the system was the exclusion of the unlearned, the unworthy, the sinners. So it was that this very feast of Matthew could only be looked upon by these Rabbis as a kind of reproach to the most fundamental principles they espoused. They were pledged to the maintenance of the separation of the wicked from the righteous, the Israelites from the Gentiles, the people of God from publicans and sinners. Here Jesus refused to maintain the

arbitrary lines they had drawn. This was not mere supercilious pride they felt; it was deep-running religious indignation. Jesus' goal, by striking contrast, was the INCLUSION of sinners, welcoming them to repent, assuring them of mercy and power to change their lives. The ideal of the rabbis was the welcoming of sinners *after* they had repented, with only the sterile stimulus to do so that is inherent in the repeated exhortations to repent and in the praise of repentance itself, with no definitive proof that the sins have actually been forgiven. This fact leaves the heart of the person trying to come back to God desperate and pessimistic. Instead of reinforcing the Pharisees' separatism, Jesus is seeming to sanction confusion of the traditional lines along which righteousness and holiness had been defined. It is no wonder that the Pharisees should be excited!

But Christ could not help arousing opposition. He was teaching the truth of God about sinners and about God, that would lead men to know genuine reality, as opposed to the sham or partial realities of their limited knowledge and experience. However, for doing this and for claiming to be the Son of God, He was opposed. For receiving sinners and eating with them, He was blamed. (Lk. 15:1, 2) Matthew himself was one of the chief reasons why the opposition so resented Jesus. It was but the age-old problem of the new idea presented in a context where people do not judge it on its own merits. They evaluate and its propounder only in terms of the way they are accustomed to interpreting it.

Ironically, for the very reason that they supposed themselves to be of superior righteousness and despised all others, these Pharisees thereby ceased to be righteous and manifested their own real sinfulness and need of mercy from God. The Pharisees were masters of refined sin too, and Jesus made strenuous efforts to win them to discipleship through repentance. Jesus' gentle speech here is an illustration. Usually, however, rather than repent, they got mad and tried to kill Him.

D. THE CONCEPT OF THE MASTER

9:12 But when He heard it, He said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. This vital question, so important because it involved the fundamental direction and purpose of Jesus' mission to earth, was asked of the disciples, but answered by Jesus. From Jesus' answer we get His own view of the work He came to accomplish. Had the disciples tried to deal with the critics, perhaps we would have something of less weight, depending upon their apprehension of His goals. Perhaps they even

tried, but the Evangelists are satisfied only to report Jesus' definitive answer, which forever settles the issue.

But observe how Jesus answered the captious question leveled at Him. As Bales (*Jesus the Ideal Teacher*, 92, 93) puts it: "Jesus appealed to a principle which they endorsed, and showed by an apt illustration which they could not dispute successfully that His conduct was endorsed by that principle . . . Jesus made another point wherein He indicated that they need to learn the meaning of certain teaching in the very scriptures which they accepted." The principle accepted by practically every Jew was that a teacher of the Law was, symbolically, a physician to the sick. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 520). It would seem that Paul in Ro. 2:17-20 is listing appellatives by which the Pharisees, among whose number Paul used to count himself, loved to identify themselves!

Thus Jesus is using here no innocuous or merely interesting figure of speech: He is refuting His opponents with a reply that cuts them two ways:

1. According to the Pharisees' own view of themselves and of the publicans, Jesus, even had He been a member of the Pharisees' own party, was precisely where He should be, thus His course was justified. Jesus is saying, "I am a Physician to those whom we all describe as sick, the ignorant and sinful people of the land. As Physician, I must make contact with those whom I would help. Were I to ignore them or despise them, I would not be true to my mission as a doctor. The doctor that spends his time only with other doctors or with the well is not worth his salt as a healer of the sick. Instead of being contaminated by the disease or carrying their contagion to others, I am bringing salvation and healing. These publicans with whom I am now feasting are the very people to whom we should minister, hence I am right where I should be, making my rounds."
2. By the same principle, the Pharisees themselves and all who shared their views were unfaithful to the ideals they espoused! "If you admit that you too are teachers of the soul and physicians to the unrighteous, why are you not mercifully ministering among these publicans too? But you shun and excommunicate these people as outcasts, never offering them the mercy of a forgiving God. Thus, by your obvious failure to live by your own ideals and principles, you confess that you are unqualified for the high honors you receive or the

high pretenses you make at being righteous! You doctors, ironically, are letting the sick die!"

3. Jesus' rebuttal has a third undertone that, by the way His argument is stated, shatters the force of the Pharisees' most fundamental presupposition. When He says: **They that are whole**, He has no intention whatever of subscribing to the Pharisees' self-estimate of themselves as righteous, fit to stand proudly before God's judgment. This expression, as well as **the righteous** in the following verse, are to be taken as ironic. As Lenski (*Matthew*, 366) asks:

Could they really be righteous when they knew no mercy for the sinners, were blind to the prophet's word demanding that they have mercy, and railed at the merciful Physician who labored among those who, according to the Pharisees themselves, so sorely needed His help? . . . Thus, even their claim to be righteous, by which they attempted to justify their contempt for sinners (cf. Lk. 18:9, 10), exposed not only the hollow falseness of their religion and the emptiness of their hearts, but also disqualified them from being the great teachers of the Law they pretended to be.

The Pharisees, in short, are here exposed as common sinners, whose best attempts at separation from sin had only left them miserable and in need of repentance. There are none in so dangerous a position as those who think they are not sick and thus refuse the healing mercies of the Physician! But lest we become too smug and pray, "Thank God I am not a Pharisee, snubbing the weak and despising the sinful!", let us remember that Jesus ministered with patient mercy even to these sinners too.

9:13 **But go ye and learn what this meaneth . . .** Edersheim (*Life*, I, 520) affirms that this command is a rabbinic formula "so often used when superficial speciousness of knowledge is directed to further thought and information." If so, the Lord assumes His proper place as the Teacher of these rabbis, using a language they can understand. But this command is much more: Jesus, being the real Physician that He is, cannot send even these Pharisees away without providing them too a cure for their own soul sickness. But was the Lord requiring that these theologians spend further time in book study and not, rather, in learning the true meaning of sacrifice by actually showing mercy? Much of God's will is not to be learned by pondering and intellectual perception, but rather by obedience.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. The parallel phrase in this citation of Hosea 6:6 completes the couplet: "And the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." This is a highly compressed saying, stating in Hebraistic style of absolute negation what we would express in relative terms. Paraphrasing this verse in a manner that would interpret the verse in its proper relative sense, we might hear God saying to Israel something like this: "When I commanded you to make sacrifices, it was not burnt offerings that I wanted; I wanted you thereby to learn mercy and the knowledge of God!" (See Notes on 5:23, volume I) The mercy of God and the mercy demanded by God of His people mean more to Him than all the perfect fulfilment of any empty ritual. Hosea does not represent God as refusing the sacrifices in themselves, but simply those sacrifices which did not represent the heart of those wicked people who supposed that thereby they could cover their sins. The mercy that God requires is that intelligent love of one's neighbor which is based upon the knowledge of God and moves one to share God's mercy with one's fellow sinners. (Cf. Mt. 18:1-35 for an even stronger polemic against that selfish mercilessness which compounds the guilt of those who sin thereby.) For similar declarations, study I Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Mic. 6:6-8; Psa. 40:6-8; 50:8-23; Prov. 21:3; Mk. 12:28-34; Heb. 10:5-8; 13:16.

Jesus' use of this highly revealing text, that indicated God's real purpose behind all the positive commandments of the Mosaic system, is to show that God is far more concerned to show mercy to sinners, far more anxious that sinners show mercy than He is to have heartless, punctilious performance of meaningless forms. The superior claims of mercy rise higher than strict justice, or that righteousness based upon the letter of the law. (Cf. Jas. 2:13 and notes on 5:7 and 6:12) Instead of freezing out the publicans and sinners, the truly righteous would have made every effort to show God's mercy by endeavoring, as patiently and loving as Jesus, to help them to understand the mind of God, repent of their sins and become the greatest of saints. Thus, for Jesus, merely to live a moral life that is devoid of practical expressions of merciful helpfulness to fellow sinners is not enough. Worse yet, it is plain deceiving, since it gives a false sense of accomplishment to the man who would shut his personal goodness off to himself. For Jesus, merely to live a religious life, made up of the outward functions and rites of religion without the spirit and content which the forms were intended to hold, is worse than useless. It blinds the man to that whole way of life which is God's service, permitting him to see only a few convenient commandments while ignoring "justice,

mercy and faith." (Cf. Mt. 23:23) These Pharisees, though extremely religious, had followed their limited views to the logical extremes and had become harsh critics, proud, completely inhuman to the point of hating "all lesser breeds." Thus Jesus exposes their character as, in God's sight, being far more condemnable than those they condemned.

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus is not disclaiming concern for the truly righteous or even admitting that there really are people so righteous that they do not need what He has to offer. Note that neither Mark nor Matthew specify to what Jesus had come to call sinners, even though Luke adds the words "to repentance." Jesus called men not only to repentance, but to Himself. It must be said, however, that a proper understanding of all that is involved in repentance is the secret of joy in the Kingdom of God. (See Notes on 3:15).

I came not to call the righteous. There are none who qualify for this title: we are all sinners! (Ro. 3:10-18, 23) Hence, we are to take Jesus' words in an ironical sense: "I came not to spend time with the self-righteous, whose self-satisfaction would keep them from appreciating the righteousness I offer. Only those who know how much they need me will accept my invitation." If Jesus' purpose is only with sinners, with the unrighteous, to give them the true righteousness, then for all the world, I would not be "righteous" (in my own sight)! For, in that case, Jesus could not help me! The duty of the truly righteous man, according to the Lord, is to admit his own sinfulness, believe Jesus and share the good news of God's mercy with his fellow sinners, regardless of the relative righteousness (or sinfulness) they may possess. Unfortunately, it never enters the head of most self-righteous individuals that UNBELIEF, a failure to accept Christ, is sin. (Jn. 3:36) The gospel of culture, civilization, morality and humanitarianism has not enough power in it to save one sinner. Only Jesus can save,—the cultured, the civilized, the moral humanitarians as well as the other common sinners!

I came to call to repentance. (Cf. Lk. 5:32) This should be the true mission of any man of God, who serves a holy God and dwells among a rebellious people. It is also, at the same time, Jesus' significant hint that His program would not stop short of anything but total religious revolution, bringing salvation, not to the privileged few, the righteous, the "whole", the elite, but to the despised outcasts, to the socially disgraced, to sinners, in short, to the world. As Bruce explains, with deep insight, (*Training*, 28): "It was one of the pregnant sayings by which Jesus made known to those who could

understand, that His religion was an universal one, a religion for humanity, a gospel for mankind, because a gospel for sinners."

I came to call sinners. How far do WE share the vision and purpose of Jesus? Are there people whom we ignore or for whom we do not pray? Are there certain individuals or classes for whom we dare not soil our "righteousness," because of the apparent gravity of their sin (in our sight)? Do we refuse to pray for or withhold every evangelistic effort to help the poor, the rich, the Indians, the Negroes, the whites, the city dwellers, the country folk or any other such group? To the extent that we are able to say, "Yes, Lord, but they are too wicked and unworthy", to that extent we do not share His vision. To that extent we do not have a universal gospel that is capable of saving ALL sinners, and it may well be doubted that a gospel that is incapable of saving EVERY sinner, is also incapable of saving the sinners that preach it. The seriousness of people's sin is never to be considered a barrier which we may use as a reason for not loving or helping anyone. Jesus came to overcome these barriers and save the sinner. To Him, the biggest sin in the world is that closed-hearted attitude of the self-righteous that never thinks of the desperate need of those whom we condemn, hence ignore. One might almost say, that, to Jesus, the greatest display of mercy is that shown to the person who needs mercy the most, the greatest sinner, the most despised.

I came to call, not the righteous, but sinners. The so-called "righteous" have separated themselves along lines of national pride, privileged monopolies on God's grace and sectarian exclusivism. But the sinners Jesus calls learn the truly desirable, proper separation. In contrast to the separation that the Pharisees demanded of others, Matthew's holiness, learned from fellowship with Jesus, was separation unto Christ, not merely separation from his fellows. His desires and acts became really holy, or separate, unto God, because he had learned the mind of God revealed by Jesus, something not true of those self-righteous, and, ultimately, unholy Pharisees who had despised him and criticized Jesus because of His association with Matthew and Matthew's kind. But it was this very discipleship, that made publicans and sinners truly righteous, actually holy, and not merely outwardly so. Jesus showed no mercy to the sinners' sin—to Jesus, Matthew's sins were still sins. To call those whom He had come to save "sinners", is a declaration of unvarying divine judgment. But to "come to call" just such people out of those sins, offering them the opportunity to become the greatest of saints, is a declaration of divine mercy. This

demonstrates the exceedingly practical nature of Jesus' ministry as well as its divine origin, because He proves by the purpose and direction of His own ministry that God is more interested in showing mercy than in holding people to the letter of the law.

E. THE CONSCIENTIOUS

One might almost entitle this next section "the Controversy" were it not for the very spirit with which the question contained therein was brought to Jesus. It is precisely this notable difference in attitude seen in the disciples of John, in contrast to the Pharisees, that makes the difference in the way the section is considered. Admittedly, John's disciples bring up a criticism of Jesus' program, but more in the spirit of inquiry for information, than to discredit Jesus before His followers.

As Bruce (*Training*, 67ff.) rightly judges in a masterful discussion on this section, this very portion of the Gospel is fundamentally a lesson on Christian liberty, the first of three that reveal the genius of Jesus' program in sharp contrast to every other religious system, Judaism in particular. These lessons arise out of His approved non-conformity to Judaism which He expressed by disregarding minute mechanical rules and by repeatedly placing much more emphasis upon the great principles of righteousness and morality. These three lessons, pointed out by Bruce, will be studied in their separate texts:

1. Fasting (here)
2. Ceremonial purifications prescribed by tradition (chap. 15:1-20)
3. Proper observance of the Sabbath (12:1-15)

The significance of these seemingly dusty texts for the modern Christian is, the fact that out of just these situations grew the religious revolution and spiritual freedom that characterize Christianity. That is, Jesus' revelation was originally made in these historic situations, in contrast to the views held by the people of that period. Hence, an appreciation of these situations is absolutely necessary in order to grasp the fundamental difference between Jesus' revelation and all legal religion (i.e. religion based upon perfect fulfilment of an infinite number of regulations, but having no assured guarantee of personal mercy for all failure). Otherwise, we moderns will rewrite the once-abolished traditions, ignore the totally new spirit Jesus intends to put into us and conclude by repeating all the same mistakes made by these ancient rabbis in relation to God's Word given at that time, losing ourselves in minutiae and missing the grand moral principles of real righteousness.

From the point of view of Jesus' disciples themselves, as they developed into Apostles under Jesus' leadership, this non-conformity towards the established usages and customs of "proper Jews", is, as Bruce notes further,

a solemn crisis in any man's life when he first departs in the most minute particulars from the religious opinions and practices of his age. The first steps in the process are generally the most difficult, the most perilous, and the most decisive. . . . It is well . . . for apprentices in religious freedom when they make their first essays in the company of an experienced friend, who can rescue them should they be in danger . . . Non-conformity invariably gives offence to many, and exposes the offending party to interrogation at least, and often to something more serious. Custom is a god to the multitude, and no one can withhold homage from the ideal with impunity.

This is a particularly valid reason for letting these texts guide our reflections as we meditate upon our own discipleship as Jesus perfects us in His image. Often this loyalty to Him will bring us into conflict with the established views, customs and usages of our age, even into conflict with the Established Church. Only as we have comprehended Jesus' message well will we be able to respond to each situation in a manner that will please Him.

1. THE SITUATION

9:14 **Then come to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?** This critical question comes from an entirely different source than the usual carping complaints of the Pharisees, a source that, at first, surprises us: **the disciples of John**. This phrase suggests that those followers of John who had not left him to follow Jesus, as had many others, were maintaining their commitment to John, even though his ministry is entirely eclipsed by that of Jesus (see Jn. 3:26) and practically terminated by his imprisonment (Lk. 3:19, 20). But why did they come? Several factors may help answer:

1. All three Evangelists unite in including this section immediately after their reporting the feast of publicans, almost as if to display the two sections by contrast: "feasting versus fasting."
2. Mark's observation (2:18): "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting" (*ēsan nēstēuontes*), suggests that Mat-

thew's feast took place on one of the traditional fast days. (Cf. Lk. 18:12) This is the more noticeable since, though this periphrastic imperfect may stand for a simple imperfect, one may well ask whether Mark intended merely to record, "as a matter of habit these fasted," and not rather to remember, "at this particular time they were even then fasting." Either way, the fact is that, though there was little or nothing in common between the religion of John the Baptist and that of the Pharisees (see, for example, Mt. 3:7ff.; 21:28-32), yet, in contrast to the acknowledged practice of Jesus, both groups fasted. So whether it was the self-imposed empty stomach that gnawed at John's disciples as they hungrily looked in on Jesus' feasting disciples, or whether they merely heard of Jesus' general reputation (cf. Mt. 11:19), their question still finds its cutting edge in their customary practice.

3. But why did John's disciples, who framed the question, put it just that way? Why mention the Pharisees at all? Why should Mark also mention the practice of these latter, whereas they do not step into the foreground? Could it be that John's followers were instigated by the Pharisees, since their last encounters with Jesus had left them silenced (Mt. 9:2-8) and rebuked (Mt. 9:9-12)? If so, they could gain much by enlisting the aid of these zealous disciples of the Baptist, since these represented a strong religious force in Judaism. In this case, this objection, lodged by John's disciples would be all the more damaging, since a contradictory diversity in practice would be exposed, placing John and Jesus in clashing opposition. The result would be disastrous for both Jesus' and John's groups, but definitely advantageous to the cause of Established Religion which had continually withstood both. Had the Pharisees not been behind the disciples of John, would it not have been more consonant with their discipleship to John to have asked, "Our master, John, has taught us to fast, but your disciples feast!"? In the absence of the guiding force of their master, were these John's disciples developing a sectarian mentality of rivalry and jealousy? Were they desiring, by their inclusion of the reference to the Pharisees, to set Jesus' disciples in the minority on a question that surely was already decided by the opposing schools of John and of the Pharisees?

Bruce suggests another motive as possibly motivating this criticism:

surprise. The disciples of John were astounded "that in respect of fasting they should approach nearer to a sect whose adherents were stigmatized by their own master as a 'generation of vipers,' than to the followers of One for whom that master cherished and expressed the deepest veneration."

Why had they come? Perhaps they had been tormented by uncertainty caused by John's imprisonment, not knowing whether to leave, to rot alone in Herod's dungeon, him who had given them the first real glimmer of messianic hope and the first real taste of genuine righteousness, in order to follow Him to whom John pointed. Any hope that they may have nurtured of John's deliverance from prison and vindication before Israel lay in Jesus' hands and He was to be found down at Matthew's house enjoying a feast with the despised scum of Jewish society! It was not the fact that Jesus received publicans and sinners that piqued them, since John himself had not rejected them. (See Lk. 3:10-14) What shattered their confidence in Him was His feasting at a time when, in their opinion, fasting and prayer would have seemed so much more appropriate. Could Jesus be the Christ if He sits down to eat and drink at a feast of publicans, while John is lying in the dungeon of Herod?

However strident the contrast might seem between Jesus' practice and their views, yet Jesus was training His disciples to act on a principle of which John's disciples neither understood the truth and validity nor the meaning. Further, until these latter asked Him, they would never grasp it. But they did come and they did ask.

2. JESUS' REPLY

Note the difference in approach used by the Lord in dealing with John's disciples and His method in dealing with the Pharisees (Mt. 15, 23, etc.) Toward these He is respectfully defensive, giving reasons for His position, whereas with the Pharisees, He denounces their marked preference for their own rules while despising God's commandments. Here, however, He is definitely on the defensive, not wounding their conscience nor attacking their practice until He could teach them. They were probably more open to learn than were the Pharisees. If it could be proved that John's disciples had not at all been motivated by the Pharisees, then their coming to Jesus reflects that attitude of anguished confidence shown later by their leader, John himself, in the hour of his great perplexity and soul anguish, when he too asked Jesus the torturing question of his heart. (Mt. 11:3)

Jesus' gentleness with John's disciples is further significant because

in no way did the Lord put in doubt the validity of John's message or practice. It is not necessary to decide whether this fasting practiced by John's disciples were actually part of his program of repentance required of Israel. Tolerant of the present state of things, which, in Jesus' view, would soon pass away, the Lord contents Himself with an appeal to His critics' sense of propriety, in order to help them see that His program and that of John were not mutually exclusive or contradictory, but represented different, progressive phases, the old and the new, of God's continuing message to Israel. In fact, Jesus' response is so very gentle that He does not actually state His conclusion directly, as though He would force them to see the truth. Rather, by means of three brilliant illustrations, He leads their minds to make His unstated conclusion.

Were we to formulate the actual conclusion to which Jesus was leading, we might state it something like this: "Real religion is that harmonious outward expression that corresponds with what the heart really feels and is. False religion involves the attempt to act without reference to that correspondence, or else to cause others to do certain acts or acquire habits without any connection to the inward condition of their heart. Fasting does not reflect the present spiritual condition of my disciples, hence should not be forced upon them artificially by some mechanical rule. While the old Judaism out of which John would preserve the finest elements and the new Christianity I represent have their respective place, it would be a catastrophe to endeavor to mix the quite different dynamics of the two."

a. FIRST ILLUSTRATION: A WEDDING IS NO PLACE TO FAST

9:15 **And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?** The sons of the bridechamber is a common Hebraism referring to those closely connected with the groom, i.e. the wedding guests. (cf. the use of the Hebraism elsewhere: Lk. 10:6; 16:8; 20:36; Ac. 4:36; Mt. 23:15; Jn. 12:36 and Edersheim's observation, *Sketches*, 152, 153) As used by Jesus here, the wedding guests are Jesus' disciples. Jesus thus calls attention to a very definite and accepted exception to the rule of fasting: must wedding guests fast? (See Edersheim, *Life, in loc.*, *Sketches*, 151-156; cf. Mt. 22:2; Jn. 2:1-10; 3:29; Rev. 19:7-9) This question in Greek, beginning as it does with the negative *mē*, shows that Jesus expected His hearers to answer, "No, of course not." By universal custom the marriage week was to be marked by unmingled festivity, a period when fasting or mourning would be especially inappropriate.

This illustration would perhaps appeal to the disciples of John with particular force, since John himself had called Jesus "the bridegroom," while referring to himself as "the friend of the Bridegroom." (Jn. 3:29) John's use of this figure actually proved the contrary of his disciples' present position, since rather than fast and mourn over Jesus' ministry, John "rejoiced greatly," his joy was now full. However, whether these disciples now questioning Jesus ever heard that comment from John does not matter, since Jesus' illustration stands independently as an approved exception to the fasting rules probably practiced.

But note that in making His answer Jesus changes from the word "fasting," as asking by John's disciples, to "mourning." By this change Jesus shows that fasting must be the expression of an afflicted heart. Hence, the question of fasting cannot be solved by a mechanical rule. It must be governed by the state of mind. Fasting is perfectly in order when called for by some preoccupation or great, absorbing life crisis. When the heart is deeply troubled, who cares about food then? Even though the Law had been painfully specific in regard to sabbaths and the great feasts, which the Jews were not at liberty to reject or ignore, yet the Mosaic legislation has little, if anything, to say about fasting, and then only in connection with an afflicted soul (See on 6:16, volume I.) Thus, each person was left at liberty to decide for himself when he should fast. Fasting at a wedding would be especially forced, unnatural and real. Therefore, unless there is some significant reason to fast, to do so would be unreasonable, hypocritical.

It is interesting to note that this principle Jesus states justifies both His own disciples as well as John's. The loss of their master's leadership through an imprisonment which would eventually end in his untimely death, was a momentous crisis for them, arising as it did out of the wickedness of the age against which John had preached. So for John's disciples there was a heart-felt need to fast.

But Bruce (*Training*, 73) points out the real danger to these men: after crystallizing a movement around John's revolutionary message of repentance and preparation for the Messiah, these his disciples had not totally committed themselves to the Bridegroom whom John had already announced. Thus, "their grief was willful, idle, causeless, when He had appeared who was to take away the sin of the world!"

Further, some of Jesus' closest disciples had originally been also disciples of John and had followed John's message more closely by leaving him

to follow Jesus. But then, finding themselves in Jesus' company, they found themselves required also to change their manner of life in harmony with their new, altered circumstances. How could they fast and mourn, when in His presence was to be found peace and joy?

But the days will come. Plummer (*Luke*, 162) regards this as a complete phrase, followed by a mournfully significant silence in which Jesus seemed almost unwilling to speak His mind because of the impact His words must necessarily have on His disciples. There is evidently power in these few words: they are the voice of the prophet. This early knowledge of Jesus' violently being snatched away from His people and their consequent grief, demonstrated that His grasp of His own divine mission was not forced upon Him from without by chain of circumstances that brought about His death. It proves, on the contrary, that, even from the beginning of His ministry, He not only knew toward what goals He moved, but He set about to reach them with unwavering purpose. (Cf. Mt. 26:11; Lk. 17:22; Jn. 2:19; etc.) Jesus knew what fidelity to God would cost Him, yet He did not swerve from this knowledge. But His omniscience, as God, assures us that He holds the future secure in His hands.

When the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast. The implication is clear that Jesus' disciples personally are meant. How then did they receive these ominous words? Their own ideas of the Messianic Kingdom did not differ greatly from those of the disciples of John, even of all Israel. If they viewed God's Kingdom as one continuous, external victory by which the Messiah asserted invincible Jewish power over the world, they were completely mistaken. If they assumed that Jesus' presence among them were permanent, they needed correction. (Cf. Jn. 12:32-34; 7:33; 13:36; 16:16-22) Here is one of the first intimations of approaching tragedy. In the nature of the case, this becomes a warning to the Apostles to count the cost. At the same time this reality, that there would be gloom in Jesus' absence, becomes a challenge to the Apostles: can you unite in your personal experience both the Christian joy and the Christian cross?

Then they will fast, of their own accord. No one will have to tell them to mourn or fast. Jesus does not say, "Then you can make them fast," which would be the exact opposite of Jesus' teaching earlier. Compelling Jesus' disciples to fast when Jesus would have been taken away from them would be as totally unnecessary as it would be totally incongruous now in His presence. Upon revealing the approaching death and departure, Jesus concedes that fasting would

under those circumstances be quite appropriate and voluntarily chosen. But in that case the value of fasting would consist not in its being forcibly imposed by others, but in its being spontaneously adopted because of the real sentiments of His disciples at that time under those altered circumstances.

b. SECOND ILLUSTRATION: NEW PATCHES DO NOT
REPAIR OLD GARMENTS

9:16 **And no man putteth a piece of undress cloth upon an old garment; for that which would fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.** It is worthy of note that Luke (5:36) calls this illustration a "parable," a fact that may not be pushed too far, since no parable can be extended to mean more than the point the author himself intended to illustrate. Nevertheless, the two following illustrations have much in common, not to mention the two additional illustrations that Luke (5:36, 39) includes. In all the illustrations, there is a particular emphasis laid upon the incongruity and impossibility of mixing something *old* with the *new* and vice versa. In all but the last there is definite loss or ruin involved in this confusion of old with new or the new with the old. The context of these parables helps to clarify their point since they were told to answer John's disciples' question that touched the radical difference between Jesus' program and that of John. (Cf. the use of *old* versus the *new*, developed by the Apostles in describing the weakness and failure of the Law versus the transforming vigor of the Gospel of Christ: (Ro. 7:6; 2 Co. 3:6; 1 Co. 11:25; Heb. 7:22; 8:6-10; 9:15-20; 12:24 in which *kainós* and *néos* are both used to describe Jesus' new program.)

Contrary to McGarvey's contention (*Matthew-Mark*, 84) that these parables "have nothing to do with the proper relation of the gospel dispensation to the Jewish law, but rather deal only with propriety of fasting on a certain occasion," an argument erroneously based upon Luke's concluding illustration (5:39), let it be urged that the whole point of Jesus' argument is to show John's disciples that His program and message, whereby His disciples are being trained, cannot be mixed with the old system with its forms and expressions of piety out of which fasting had come as a specific, representative practice.

The literal expression of Jesus' illustration is based upon the absurdity of using a patch of new cloth that is not pre-shrunk to repair an old robe. At first washing, the new patch would only rip the tear still wider, as the shrinking patch pulls against the threads

of the repaired robe. At this point Luke (5:36) sets forth the antithesis of this illustration by bringing in another illustration using exactly the same figure with another emphasis. This should be called the third illustration:

No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new and the piece from the new will not match the old.

Taken together, these two similar but antithetic parables teach that the religion of Jesus is in no sense just Judaism patched up, modified or revised for a later age. It is something entirely new, separate and distinct. Nor can Jesus' program be adjusted to fit the mentality of the old system without irreparable damage to what He is bringing into being. Old Judaism cannot bear mending by the superimposition of a totally new concept of man's relationship with God upon Judaism's forms. This would only destroy Judaism. But fasting came out of the old system under which John's disciples had been trained, precisely as feasting came out of the natural environment in which Jesus' disciples were being trained. And to deprive Jesus' followers of this freedom from fasting while He was with them would confound the message they had been taught to believe. To force the Pharisees and others to stop fasting before they had grasped the spirit of what Jesus was bringing to men, would destroy the fabric of religious consciousness they had developed under Judaism.

C. THIRD ILLUSTRATION: NEW WINE BURSTS OLD WINESKINS

9:17 Neither do men put new wine into old wineskins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved. Wine-skins are skin jugs made from a single goat-skin from which the flesh and bones are removed without cutting the body; only the head is removed leaving the neck of the animal to become the neck of the bottle. (For their use, see Gen. 21:14, 15, 19; Job 38:37; Psa. 119:83) When new, the flexibility of the skin permits considerable expansion due to the pressure of the carbon-dioxide present in the wine during fermentation. However, when the skins have become inflexible with age, they are not able to expand, not absorbing thus the internal pressure of the liquid that can burst a common glass bottle. This is why they explode, causing the loss of their contents. (Hear Elihu's complaint, Job 32:19)

The main point of Jesus' illustration is that the physical results produced by expanding new wine do not mix with the inelasticity of

old wine-skins. Here again, as in the former illustration, there is contrast between the old and the new. Lenski notes (*Matthew*, 370):

This illustration advances the thought. The old cannot be kept by adding a *little* of the new, nor by combining all of the new with it. In this respect there is a parallelism of thought. But again both illustrations speak of conserving: the first, the old robe; the second, the new wine . . . In this respect the illustrations are antithetic.

But there is also another current of thought in Jesus' illustration, not specifically stated but immediately below the surface: conservation, not only of the new robe from which no patches are taken and the new wine in the new wineskins, but also of the old robe with old patches and old wine in old wineskins. Jesus is not arguing that the old system was not good or that the forms which expressed it were bad, like, for example, fasting. In fact, He actually admits that honest admirers of the ancient system of Judaism would have difficulty quickly changing over to the new system of Christ. (Lk. 5:39) He does not propose the burning of the old robe or the destruction of the old wineskins, since each served its purpose in its time. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the prophets but to fulfill them. (See Notes on 5:17, 18, Volume I) But once the old robe or the old wineskins had served their purpose and could no longer be repaired or filled with the power and vigor of the new, they must be replaced.

Both are preserved. Jesus is interested primarily in preserving the vital spiritual force of the Gospel as well as the forms in which it would be expressed. He knows that it would be fatal to limit Christianity by trying to express it in the thought-forms and rituals of a legal system. Christianity must have modes of expression that are consonant with its nature. In the establishment of Christianity among men, the Apostles declared authoritatively what fundamental forms express Jesus' new religion. To the extent that the Lord or His Apostles have described these new forms, or their content, it is heresy to seek other forms and accept other content.

But this raises the burning question about what we should do when the new robe, the new wine of Christianity, because of the sterilizing power of tradition, becomes in our day "old wine, old cloth, old wineskins." We can but pray, "Lord, make us into new wine again; transform our tired, worn-out robe into new cloth." Then, in agreement with our prayer, we will seek in the original message of Jesus and the Apostles that transforming power which will bring us back to what the Lord wanted originally. We should remember with

Lenski (*Matthew*, 371) that the modern philosophies that reject the supernatural and the religious views that revere the traditions of the fathers, both of which reject Jesus today, are nothing but the ancient Pharisees and Sadducees with updated names. To follow them would be but to fall into the ancient but rejected errors of those who crucified the Lord. The so-called "new categories of thought, new concepts of sin and righteousness, new visions of God, new morality" are nothing but old errors, heresies and ignorance rewritten, revised and reissued. Our only hope for remaining new wine is by ever coming back to Jesus; only His message is ever new, however long ago, historically, He gave it.

Jesus says, "The content of the new relationship with God that I propose cannot be confined within the mode of expression of Judaism. There is such power and vigor in the Gospel, that, by its very nature, it bursts the constrictions of Judaism, or of any other legal system with which it is put." This is why Christianity with its modes of expression is a completely different kind of thing than Judaism, even though it is founded upon the preparations made for it in the Law and Prophets.

There is a succinct warning, however, in Jesus' admission that there would be plenty of admirers of the old wine, (Lk. 5:39) "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says 'The old is good.'" He points out how natural it is for those, who have been accustomed to the old worn-out forms of Judaism, to be unwilling to abandon them for what they would consider to be "untried and novel." Jesus faces the reality of the old conservatives, the reactionaries in Judaism whose lives were bound up in the formalism and thought patterns of the past. Barclay (*Matthew, in loc.*) sees the problem of the new idea here:

Jesus was perfectly conscious that He came to men with new ideas and a new conception of the truth, and He was well aware how difficult it is to get a new idea into men's minds at all . . . Our minds must be elastic enough to receive and contain new ideas, since the history of progress is the history of the overcoming of the prejudices of the shut mind.

Some might take exception to Jesus' argument, saying, "But it is universally conceded among those who know good wines, that the old wine is in fact the best, the most fully matured, the richest flavored." But Plummer (*Luke*, 164) answers:

The comparative *merits* of the old and the new wine are not touched by the parable, but the *taste* for them. One who is

accustomed to old will not wish for new: it does not attract him by look or fragrance . . . The prejudiced person will not even try the new, or admit that it has *any* merits. He knows that the old is pleasant, and suits him; and that is enough; he is not going to change . . .

Compare the relative conversion of an outcast tax-collector, who had less prejudice for the old system, with the conversion of a Pharisee who had advanced in Judaism beyond many fellow countrymen and extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. (Gal. 1:13-17; Phil. 3:5, 6; I Tim. 1:13; Ac. 26:14).

One more note is in order regarding how Jesus dealt with His objectors. He practiced what He preached: mercy and not sacrifice. According to the letter of divine truth and justice, he could have cut down John's disciples with a withering fire of irrefutable argument. By the sheer power of His voice He could have given them no ground. But in mercy the Lord here gives us a beautiful example by which we may grasp the truth that "the Lord's servant must not strive, but be kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth"! (2 Tim. 2:24, 25) Our Master was that way. He knew how to concede a point, admitting the natural preference of some Jews for ancient Judaism. As Bruce writes (*Training*, 75)

This striking sentiment exhibits rare candour in stating the case of opponents, and not less rare modesty and tact in stating the case of friends . . . Too seldom for the church's good have lovers of the old ways understood Christ's wisdom, and lovers of new ways sympathized with His charity.

What Jesus required of the Pharisees (9:13), He Himself practiced in this critical encounter with John's disciples. He is not willing that any of these men should perish, but that they should all come to repentance by leaving the old forms of Judaism, stop trying to correct the faults of the old and just become new men in a new, totally different relation with God. This they could do in His discipleship to which, by His very gentleness in dealing with their problem, He leaves the door open. He proves in everyday practice what He will later affirm of Himself, His meekness (Mat. 11:29). This sheer gentleness with opponents, when such invincible power lay within His grasp, sets Jesus apart as the real Savior of men. (Cf. 2 Co. 13:10) This attractive gentleness of Jesus, whereby He deals effectively with

human problems, without destroying the confidence or glimmer of hope that Jesus could help, probably caused John's disciples later to return to the Master, when their great light in Israel had been extinguished. (Jn. 5:35; Mt. 14:12). Here then is the might and wisdom of meekness.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is a "place of toll"?
2. Who were the publicans? Describe their occupation, public notariety, religious and political character as viewed by their contemporaries.
3. Describe Matthew's response to Jesus' invitation to be His disciple.
4. Give evidence that renders psychologically sound the impression given in the text that Matthew responded immediately and decisively to Jesus' unusual invitation.
5. Tell all you know about Matthew Levi.
6. What passage of Scripture did Jesus cite (book, chapter and verse) in defense of His intimacy with such scum as the publicans, and sinners.
7. What was the probable reason for Matthew's giving this feast for Jesus as well as for his acquaintances?
8. What were the complaints offered regarding Jesus' feasting and what two separate groups made them? How did these complaints as well as the complainers differ from each other?
9. Explain the three parabolic figures used by Jesus to answer the questions raised by those who objected to His feasting instead of fasting.
10. What particular twist does Luke give to the last illustration, thus making it a fourth illustration? What does Jesus mean by this latter picture?
11. What particular facts out of oriental life and culture does one need to know in order to grasp the meaning of Jesus' last three illustrations about the present bridegroom, the torn cloth needing repair and the bursting wineskins?
12. Explain the point of view behind the question posed by the disciples of John.
13. Explain why it was so natural and right for Jesus to be found generally surrounded by sinners. Show how this fact just as deeply demonstrates His identity and true mission to earth as His stupendous miracles.

Section 20

JESUS RAISES JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

(Parallels: Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:49-56)

TEXT: 9:18-26

18. While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.
19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so *did* his disciples.
20. And behold, a woman, who had an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment:
21. for she said within herself, If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole.
22. But Jesus turning and seeing her said, Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.
23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a tumult,
24. he said, Give place: for the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.
25. But when the crowd was put forth, he entered in, and took her by the hand; and the damsel arose.
26. And the fame hereof went forth into all that land.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What kind of faith in Jesus did Jairus and this sick woman have that drove them to Jesus? What factors probably brought them to this kind of belief?
- b. What is your opinion? Was the miracle of healing performed on the woman without the knowledge and will of Jesus?
- c. Why do you think the woman would wish to resort to the method she chose, rather than simply ask Jesus directly for help?
- d. Why did Jesus stop to embarrass this poor woman? She was embarrassed, was she not? What possible motive could Jesus have had for doing it?
- e. Why was the woman so afraid after she had been healed? Would we not rather expect confidence and joy of her than fear?
- f. Why do you think Jesus said "only believe," to the desperate Jairus when the news came of the death of his daughter? How could that help?

- g. Why would Jesus permit no more to enter the room where the maiden lay dead than just a few? Why should He drive everyone else out? Would it not seem better to have as many witnesses to this miraculous event as possible?
- h. Why did Jesus order Jairus and his wife to provide some nourishment for their daughter after He raised her from the dead? Could not He have provided miraculous bread for the little girl?
- i. What possible reason could Jesus have for not wanting this miracle reported? Was He ashamed of what He had done, or, perhaps, did He fear critical examination of the evidence for the fact and knew that He had foisted a common deception upon the parents? What was to gain by demanding silence over this miracle?
- j. Do you think that Jesus really expected the people to keep quiet about this wonderful miracle performed upon the only daughter of a prominent official? Could He not have foreseen that at least the neighbors would have known the facts and so divulged the information? If He did not expect them to be silent about the miracle, why then did He sternly instruct them to be silent? If He did expect them to remain silent, how did He expect His instructions to be carried out against human nature?
- k. Why did Jesus have the Gadarene demoniac spread the news of his great deliverance, but requires the opposite of Jairus and countless others?
- l. Why do you suppose Mark quotes Jesus' words to the dead maiden in Aramaic? Does this give any indication whether Jesus usually spoke Aramaic or Greek? How would you go about deciding? Is there any value in knowing the answer?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now when Jesus had returned across the Sea of Galilee in a boat and arrived on the other side, He disembarked at His home, Capernaum. Instantly a large crowd of people began to gather about Him and welcome Him back, because they had all been waiting for His return.

While He was standing there on the beach talking to them, a man named Jairus, one of the synagogue officials, came up through the crowd. When he spotted Jesus, he fell to his knees before Him, worshipped Him, begging Him desperately to come to his home, since his only twelve year-old daughter was dying. He pleaded, "My little girl is about to die! She is dead (if you do not come!) Just come lay your hands on her to heal her and she will live!"

So Jesus started out to follow him with His disciples. But as

they went, a large crowd of people followed too, the people all crowding through the narrow streets. They were all around Him. Now, notice, there was a woman in that crowd who had suffered a hemorrhage for twelve years. This lady had gone through a great deal under the treatment of many doctors. She had spent all her money and still could not be healed by any of them. She was no better off; rather, she had gotten worse. She too had heard what people were saying about Jesus. So she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched the fringe on His robe. She did this because she had said to herself, "If I could just touch His cloak, I would be healed." Right then and there her hemorrhage stopped, and she knew in her body that she was cured of her disease.

Jesus, aware that healing power had left Him, immediately stopped, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes? Who was it that touched me?"

When all denied it, Peter and those disciples who were with Him, objected, "Master, you see so many people all around you, pressing against you, and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

Meanwhile Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then He reaffirmed, "Someone touched me. I know because I felt healing power leave me."

But when the woman, realizing that she had been healed, saw that she had not really escaped notice, came forward trembling fearfully. Falling down at Jesus' feet, she laid before Him the whole story. She admitted before everyone why she had touched Him and affirmed that she had been instantaneously cured.

Looking right at her, Jesus encouraged her, "Cheer up, Daughter, it is your faith in me that has healed you. Go in peace, healed of your disease."

Immediately the woman was cured!

While He was still talking to her, a messenger came from Jairus' home with the news, "Your daughter is gone. Why bother the Rabbi further?"

But Jesus, overhearing and ignoring what was said, comforted the synagogue official, "Now do not be afraid, just trust me and she shall be well."

Then Jesus cut the size of the group down to Peter, James and John and hurried along to Jairus' house. When they arrived at the house, He permitted only these three and the child's father and mother to go in. He heard the funeral music and saw the crowd in general commotion. The people inside the house were weeping and wailing

loudly, mourning her death. But when Jesus went in, He asked them, "Why all this commotion and weeping? Stop crying and leave, because the little girl is not dead, just sleeping."

This drew a scornful laugh, since they all knew that she was really dead.

But Jesus ordered them all outside the house and led the little girl's father and mother and His companions into the room where the child was. Then, taking the little girl by the hand, He said to her in Aramaic, "Talitha cumi," which means, "My child, get up."

Instantly her life returned. The girl stood up immediately and walked around. She was twelve. Her parents just could not get over it, they were so overcome with happiness.

But Jesus very earnestly instructed them not to tell anyone about what had happened. Then He directed them to give her something to eat. The story of this became the talk all around that country.

SUMMARY

No sooner had Jesus returned from the Decapolis where He had freed the two Gadarene demoniacs, when He was met at the boat by well-wishing crowds who had been waiting for Him. No sooner had He begun talking with them than Jairus, an important synagogue official, requested Jesus to come immediately to heal his dying daughter. On the way, Jesus' progress is not only impeded by surging throngs blocking the streets, but also by a woman whom He stopped to heal of a long-standing disease, a hemorrhage. Messengers informed Jairus that in the meantime his little girl had died. Whereupon Jesus encouraged him not to lose heart but trust Him. To hurry, Jesus reduced His entourage to three men and reached the ruler's house only to find the funeral already in progress. Jesus, Jairus and the three Apostles rush into the house. Jesus said, "Stop the music: funeral's over! The little lamb is asleep, not dead." Everyone thought His words in bad taste and utterly ridiculous since they knew the child to be dead. But after ordering the crowd to leave the house, Jesus raised the damsel to life. The overjoyed parents' part was to provide the little girl some food. Jesus tried to keep the matter private, but the story spread anyway.

NOTES

I. THE REQUEST OF JAIRUS DELIVERED (9:18, 19)

9:18 While He spake these things unto them, as a phrase, immediately raises the obvious questions: to whom? about what things?

Some harmonists use this phrase as if it were the clearest clue regarding the connection of contexts given by the three Evangelists, since Mark and Luke only begin this section of their respective narratives with the word "and" (*kaí*) which loosely connects this section with what they record as preceding. Matthew, on the other hand, begins his narration of Jairus' request with a genitive absolute that contains the apparently strict connection of time subsequent to what had immediately before been narrated, i.e. Matthew's feast and the ensuing discussion with John's disciples. In which case, we would know both the people with whom Jesus spoke as well as the subject matter.

But it is strange that Mark and Luke, who so often generally follow a more chronological arrangement, should now find themselves agreeing together on this point over against Matthew, who more often follows a logical system! Mark and Luke connect this request made by Jairus with Jesus' return from Decapolis by boat after the freeing of the Gadarene demoniacs. (See Mk. 5:18-22; Lk. 8:38-41) And in fairness, it must be admitted that Matthew too, however much more generally, puts Jairus' request after Jesus' return from Decapolis (Mt. 8:34; 9:1, 18), with the exception that he inserts the accounts of the forgiven paralytic (9:2-8) and the call of Matthew, the feast of the publicans and the question from John's disciples (9:9-17), events which Mark and Luke locate elsewhere. As noticed before, this does not surprise us, since Matthew has made no pretences of following a strictly chronological sequence. But what is surprising is Matthew's rather precise time connection with which he introduces this narrative. Even though this second view of the question is taken in the PARAPHRASE-HARMONY, it remains an admitted difficulty how Matthew's introductory phrase is to be understood by the original readers of his Gospel who had no opportunity to compare Mark and Luke. Certainly they would have connected the phrase with the immediate context, as indicated above. But as noted by some commentators, this phrase by Matthew is introduced apparently without reason, until the other Evangelists are consulted. They, in turn inform us that Jesus was indeed met at the seashore by a great crowd of people who had been waiting to welcome Him back. It would then be this group He was addressing when Jairus arrived. This puts the emphasis upon the independent witness of the separate Gospel writers who give varying features of the same event while unwittingly complementing each other's testimony.

But the greater problem raised by Jairus' arrival is that, since Jesus was just in Capernaum the day before, before He sailed for the

eastern shore, why had not the ruler brought the case of his daughter before Jesus then, before she got into this desperately sick condition?

1. This condition could have been caused by the sudden attack of some lethal illness or of a poison, a situation which would have left Jairus quite unprepared to intercept Jesus in time before He sailed.
2. Or perhaps the ruler's own faith had not developed into that concrete confidence in Jesus that would have caused him to take that decisive step the day before. Could it be that the growth of his faith in Jesus had to overcome his own personal pride?

While He spake these things unto them, certainly indicates the emergency nature of Jairus' request, as if, having once made the decision to ask Jesus, he must now interrupt what the Lord is saying to make his plea known. But Jesus, too, is willing to interrupt an important discussion (and what discussion of His was NOT important?) to heal the broken heart of this grieving father. Discussion was important, but the actual call of human need, to practice God's mercy in actual cases, drove Jesus to action. His doctrine did not stop with discussion and theory but ACTION!

Behold, there came a ruler, named Jairus, one of the Jewish elders, responsible for the administration of the synagogue (Mk. 5:22), a pillar of Jewish orthodoxy in Capernaum. But his wealth and position meant nothing when death visited his home. Standing helpless before the tragedy that is at this moment threatening to strike his little girl, he comes to Jesus. That Jairus lived in Capernaum, hence had many excellent opportunities to see Jesus' miracles for himself and come to this position of faith, is decided by comparing Mt. 9:1: "Getting into a boat He crossed over and came to **His own city,**" with Mk. 2:1 where it is learned that Jesus was "at home" in Capernaum. This had been Jesus' headquarters since His removal there early in His career (Jn. 2:12; Mt. 4:13). Had Jairus earlier joined his colleagues in accusing Jesus of blasphemy? (Mt. 9:2-8) Had he discussed the healing, done by Jesus at long distance, with the government official (Jn. 4:46b ff.)? Had he been among the delegation sent by the centurion to request Jesus' healing for his servant? (Lk. 7:3-5) Whatever had been his conviction earlier, the circumstances in his family were facts stronger than theories. Now as never before he must decide what he thinks about this Rabbi from Nazareth! But he must decide carefully for a man in his position has everything to lose, should he choose wrongly: the disgrace brought

about by failure, would be impossible to bear, his townspeople impossible to live with. He could be turned out of his influential position and laughed out of town! Jairus must have reckoned with this possibility as he weighed every facet of this question. He must now decide whether he believes Jesus or not. But this internal struggle is rendered most severe by the rapidly deteriorating condition of his only daughter who lay dying before his eyes. Surely all of the past miracles of Jesus now loom large in Jairus' mind, tipping the balance in favor of appealing to Jesus for help now. So he goes.

A ruler worshipped Him. (See on 2:2; 4:9, Vol. I) This homage is deeply significant, not because somebody falls at the feet of Jesus, but because *THIS* man, this member of the school board, this leader in religious matters, does it. As a man of position high in Jewish society, he stands to be disgraced if Jesus could not do exactly what he now asks. If he is trusting his cause to a Nazarene Rabbi, with whose views his unbelieving colleagues violently differed, he has more than personal pride to forfeit. Thus, this act requires great courage, born of love for his only child and confidence in and respect for Jesus, to grovel in the dust not only in front of Jesus, but in full view of the large crowd of people gathered about Him. (See Mk. 5:21; 8:40)

What is most noticeable here is that, while Jesus refused all forms of human ostentation and preached against it mercilessly, He accepted without blush this worship. (Contrast the proper response shown by His servants: Peter, Ac. 10:25, 26; the Angel, Rev. 19:10) Who is this that permits such high, respected religious officials to worship Him?

Saying, My daughter is even now dead. The problem immediately arises here how to harmonize this declaration of the father, as reported by Matthew, with his statement recorded by Mark and Luke: "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." (Mk. 5:23) "She was dying." (Lk. 8:42) Later, according to Mark, and Luke, a messenger from Jairus' house reports the actual moment of death, after this appeal of Jairus had been made to the Lord. Two principle solutions have been offered to this apparent contradiction:

1. Either Jairus did not say it, in which case Matthew puts words into his mouth. Those who seek to point out that Matthew merely abbreviates the account, while Mark and Luke give the fuller version, must face the resultant weakness in Matthew's historical reporting that such a harmonization involves. Here

the fact that Matthew's Gospel is topical, as opposed to the chronological versions of Mark and Luke, does not help. For, even if for sake of brevity, Matthew puts words in Jairus' mouth on one occasion, which he did not say himself but heard from others on a later occasion, what is to keep Matthew from reporting words that *Jesus* did not say? Or facts that He did not do?

2. Or³ Jairus did say it, in which case his words may be interpreted in a sense that permit them to be a faithful description of the facts as he knew them when he left home in search of Jesus. See PARAPHRASE/HARMONY at this point. Barnes (*Matthew-Mark*, 102) observes:

It is likely that a father, in these circumstances, would use a word as nearly expressing actual death as would be consistent with the fact that she was alive . . . 'My daughter was so sick that she must be by this time dead.'

Augustine, cited by Trench (*Miracles*, 108) commented: "For such was his despair that his desire was rather that she should be brought to life, since he did not think it possible she should be found alive, who was dying when he left her." Bengel, cited by Trench (*op cit.*) thinks that "this he said at a guess." Trench himself concludes:

When the father left his child, she was at the latest gasp; he knew life was ebbing so fast when he quitted her side, that she could scarcely be living still; and yet, having no certain notices of her death, he was perplexed whether to speak of her as departed or not, and thus at one moment would express himself in one language, at the next in another.

With this latter suggested harmonization agree also the latter words of Mark (5:23) "that she may be made well and live." Thus, Mark, while describing the daughter as "at the point of death," also intimates Jairus' anxiety and awareness that perhaps, even as he spoke, his only begotten had passed on. This latter harmonization also leaves Matthew's reporting intact without assuming abbreviation, and reveals even more poignantly the truest psychological expression of the father.⁴ The problem is most easily resolved, therefore, not by examining Matthew's reporting but by insight into the contradictory feelings in the heart of Jairus.

But come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. How many times had this ruler of the synagogue seen Jesus heal just this way, by putting His hands upon the sick? **She shall live:** he asks for more than the common rabbi's blessing; he demands life! These are words of faith, although not of so great faith as that of the centurion, since Jairus could not conceive of Jesus as being able to speak the word from where He stood, to heal his daughter. (Cf. 8:8) Nor did Jesus require him to accept such a great test of his confidence in His power, as He did of the other Capernaum official (Jn. 4:46b-53) Instead

9:19 **Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples.** Imagine the scene: Jesus, having acknowledged the warm reception awaiting Him at the waterfront, was talking with the gathered crowds. Jairus interrupted to make his frantic plea. Now Jesus and the Twelve get moving through the crowds following the lead of Jairus. But the intensely curious people whose chief interest was the Lord do not necessarily open up a path in their midst to permit easy passage for this emergency. By the time the immediate party of Jesus arrive in town it becomes almost impossible to make rapid headway through the people (Cf. Mk. 5:24; Lk. 8:42b especially in Greek: *synéblibon* and *sunépnigon*) crowding the narrow streets.

Why and how such a large crowd could be waiting for Jesus on the beach as He disembarked is easily explained by two facts:

1. They could be easily amassed at the beach long before He arrived, since the familiar boat in which He rode (Peter's) could be seen coming across the lake long before it was pulled up on the western shore.
2. The explanation of the excitement of the people and their desire to welcome Him back is found in the unabated excitement of the preceding day, which, according to Mark and Luke, was a moment of great popularity for Jesus. (See on 8:23) Jesus had literally sailed away to escape this excitement. Now the people wait for Him, gather around Him and welcome His return. No wonder that, upon His first call to go elsewhere, they crowd around Him, reluctant to let Him out of their sight.

But in so doing, they impede His progress and unwittingly frustrate Jairus as much as humanly tolerable!

II. THE ROBE OF JESUS DISCREDITED (9:20-22)

9:20 **And behold, a woman, who had an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him.** Here was one person in that

vast throng that was not the least bit curious about what would happen at Jairus' home. Her desperation and determination drove all other considerations from her mind: she was concentrating on her one last chance to be well after years of failure. Her hemorrhage must be seen from the Jewish legal standpoint to be able to appreciate the measures she adopted for her healing here. She was:

1. Banned in a practical way from worship of God in the temple, since the hemorrhage rendered her Levitically unclean (Lev. 15:19-31) and contaminating to all she touched (Num. 19:22). So she dared not venture into the Temple with the other worshippers (Num. 19:20; Lev. 15:31; cf. God's symbolic use of exactly this woman's situation as an expression of His deep disgust for Israel: Ezek. 36:17).
2. Practically excluded from normal marriage relations (Lev. 16:24).
3. She should not even have been in this crowd, for she brought ceremonial uncleanness upon all she touched.
4. Practically penniless (Mk. 5:26) having spent more on medicines and doctors than on essentials. Until medicine was developed into a science, its practice in those days bordered more upon witchcraft, ignorance and superstition than upon knowledge. (See Edersheim's description of typical prescriptions offered for this particular case, *Life*, I, 620) No cure, for which she paid, worked.
5. Decidedly incurable and growing worse (Mk. 5:26; Lk. 8:43).
6. Unbelievably desperate after waging this futile battle for twelve years against an illness that left her without her strength, her social intercourse, her worship.

Is it any surprise then, when we view her plight from this standpoint, that she should approach Jesus this way?

She came behind Him, and touched the border of His garment: for she said within herself, If I do but touch His garment, I shall be made whole. Why would this woman wish to touch just the border of Jesus' garment rather than ask Him directly for help?

1. Having already dealt with so much superstition that passed for medicine, as well as being Jewish, hence, affected by the views Jews held toward the sacred fringe (see below), she may have held a somewhat superstitious view of His clothes. It is presumed she was Jewish, only in the absence of a declaration that she was gentile, something that the gospel writers would probably have not failed to notice.

2. The nature of her illness might cause her in fitting modesty to seek a "private miracle." After all, she could not go to request Jesus' help in the synagogues. And, in private, He was nearly always surrounded by His close men friends, His disciples. She must meet Him somehow while He was going from one place to another. But because of her particular disease, she could hardly force herself to make her need public.
3. But her Jewish background would teach her that she would contaminate everyone she touched, hence she would most naturally try to touch Jesus without making anyone else aware of it. But did she not believe that she would not also render Jesus impure? Had she heard about Jesus' touching the leper without great concern for His own purity? (Mt. 8:3) Or did she even consider these questions? Her understanding is certainly conditioned by precisely what she had heard about Him. (Mk. 5:27)
4. Could it be that her humiliating poverty and ignorance of Jesus' gracious willingness to help without charge, caused her to try to sneak this unpaid blessing away from Him?
5. Could it be that her desperation, brought about by years of semi-invalidism, led her to conclude this method to be the only one she dared risk? It is impossible for us to know perfectly the mental state with which she now approached the Lord.

These questions only superficially examine the woman's situation from the naturalistic point of view. Jesus' words (9:22) are decisive in declaring that her real motive for coming to Him was her faith. These words (9:21), however tinged with ignorance they may seem to us, are the expression of her faith! Jesus respected even this amount of trust she had in Him, in order to bring her to fuller knowledge and more intelligent faith.

The border of His garment. The westerner might ask why not merely touch Jesus while standing erect, or perhaps touch a fold of His robe without stooping to take hold especially of the border? But to the Jews the border of the outer garment was especially meaningful, since God had ordered them to make blue tassels at the four corners of their outer cloak as a reminder to them of their holiness unto God as His people committed to do His will. (Num. 15:37-41; Dt. 22:12) Arndt-Gingrich (449), translating *kráspedon*, put "edge, border, hem of a garment," as first definition, but include the "tassel which the Israelite was obligated to wear," with the proviso: "de-

pending on how strictly Jesus followed the Mosaic law, and also upon the way in which *kráspedon* was understood by the authors and first readers of the gospels." If the tassels are meant, they were fastened at the four corners of a large square of cloth with a hole in the middle for the head. When put on, this was folded over the shoulders with half in front, half in back much like a poncho. With tassels on the two front corners and the two back, it would be easy for anyone to touch one of the back tassels without the wearer feeling the touch. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 623; who thinks that exact knowledge about the nature of Jesus' outer garment is not necessary, since the law would be fulfilled when the tassels were attached to the corners of any garment of any design.) Since the Pharisees attached great importance to the tassel by enlarging theirs (probably just another case of ostentation to gain special merit for obvious piety), this woman may have decided that the robe of Jesus possessed special power that she might receive by merely touching it, thus without disturbing Him or rendering public the nature of her affliction.

I shall be made whole. Looking at her actions as the expression of great faith, rather than half-enlightened superstition, Edersheim (*Life*, I, 626) suggests that she had thought about Jesus as One whose word, spoken at a distance had brought healing, and he concludes:

What strong faith to expect that even contact with him, the bare touch of His garment, would carry such Divine Power as to make "her 'whole' . . . She believed so much in Him, that she felt as if it needed not personal appeal to Him; she felt so deeply the hindrances to her making request of Himself, that believing so strongly in Him, she deemed it sufficient to touch, not even Himself, but that which in itself had no power or value, except as it was in contact with His Divine Person.

9:22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said . . . The process by which Jesus singled her out among the crowd is here greatly abbreviated as Matthew omits what Mark and Luke record as a short conversation noted in the PARAPHRASE-HARMONY.

One problem, noted by many commentators but left unsolved by most and unsatisfactorily handled by the rest, is: did this miracle occur with the foreknowledge and will of Jesus? That is, did Jesus see her coming, perceive her heart and need and deliberately heal her when she touched His

garment? It is easy to assert His omniscience on the basis of other texts, but that would not solve the question raised by this text, since there were certain things Jesus chose not to know, such as the time of His return (Mt. 24:36) and the exact quantity of faith of the centurion (Mt. 8:10 on which see Notes) or the unbelief of the Nazarenes (Mk. 6:6), for by both He was genuinely surprised. Unfortunately, our text does not state when Jesus knew the woman's purpose or whether He exercised His will to heal her. The Evangelists do note clearly that the Lord was immediately aware that power had gone from Him to heal (Mk. 5:30; Lk. 8:46). Further, His deliberate gesture of looking around to see her who (*ideîn tēn*) had done it (Mk. 5:32) and His question: "Who touched me and my garments?" can also be harmonized just as much with a desire to bring this hidden healing before the crowd as with a genuine desire for information. (Other illustrations where Jesus knew the answer to questions He asked in order to teach or clarify an issue: Cf. Lk. 9:47 with Mk. 9:33; Jn. 6:5, 6; Lk. 24:17)

If He asks for information, in which case His personal knowledge and will were not involved in the healing, how then was the woman healed? It is answered by some that God the Father in His absolute omniscience knew the woman's intention and approach, and so healed her by power from Jesus, whose human attention was deliberately concentrated elsewhere, i.e. upon Jairus and his needs. Jesus, then, aware of the healing but not immediately of the identity of the healed, stopped to discern who it was. Turning His divine attention to this question, by omniscience He knows who it was before she came forward.

These suggestions are admittedly not without problems, due both to the deliberate limitation of information shown by the Holy Spirit as well as by our ignorance of the true nature of the God-Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus' purpose in asking the questions was not to embarrass the poor woman, but to bring to light the facts of her case, her miraculous healing and to correct what misconceptions she had about His willingness to heal her or about the power that accomplished it. His question, asked in masculine gender (Lk. 8:45: *tis ho hapsámenós mou;*), leaves her free to admit what she had done. But her fear and

trembling, noticed by both Mark and Luke, arise perhaps from fear that He was offended by what she had done in secretly taking a blessing while contaminating Him by her touch or that He might take back the blessing, leaving her thus forever hopeless after knowing an instant of perfect health. (Cf. 2 Kg. 5:20-27)

But why did Jesus stop to point her out before the crowd, even though it must certainly embarrass her? The primary motive was His concern for her. He stopped and took time to concentrate all of His precious time, energy and attention upon this one human soul, for this was HER hour of need. Then, He must do this out of concern for the crowd and for His own honor. Her desire to hide the cure was cheating both her and the other people of the joy in knowing what Jesus desired to communicate both to her and all men. Her desire to hide was also withholding the thanks and honor due Him. Superstition could arise from this incident insinuating that Jesus' robe itself possessed magical powers quite independent of His knowledge and will. So several reasons suggest themselves to explain Jesus' actions:

1. Jesus wanted to prevent the misconception that there might be some magic power in His garments. Plummer (*Luke*, 236) summarizes: "It was the grasp of her faith, not of her hand, that wrought the cure." It was her confidence in Him that healed her, not magic or superstitious reverence for a tassel! Jesus Himself discredited His own robe, leaving no place for sacred relics to be specially venerated in His religion.

This incident was definitely not Jewish magic. (See Edersheim, *Life*, II, Appendix XVI, 775) Nor was it that practiced by Asians or westerners of a period shortly later when the Apostles in the name of Jesus combatted those very forms of the black arts, condemning those practices in no uncertain terms. However, some of their miracles, comment Conybeare and Howson, (*Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, 372),

were accommodated to the peculiar forms of sin, superstition, and ignorance they were required to oppose.

The narrative of what was done by St. Paul at Ephesus (Acts 19:11, 12) should be compared with St. Peter's miracles at Jerusalem (Act. 5:12-16). . . .

Though the change was usually accomplished on the speaking of a word, intermediate agency was sometimes employed; . . . (Jn. 9:6, 7). The hem of

Christ's garment was made effectual to the healing of a poor sufferer and the conviction of the bystanders. So on this occasion garments were made the means of communication of a healing power to those who were at a distance, whether they were possessed with evil spirits, or afflicted with ordinary diseases. Such effects, thus publicly manifested, were a signal refutation of the charms and amulets and mystic letters of Ephesus. Yet was this no encouragement to blind superstition. When the suffering woman was healed by touching the hem of the garment, the Savior . . . said, 'Virtue is gone out of me.' And here at Ephesus we are reminded that it was God who 'wrought miracles by the hands of Paul' (ver. 11), and that 'the name,' not of Paul, but 'of *the Lord Jesus*, was magnified' (ver. 17).

Jesus needed to demonstrate His certain knowledge of the miracle. To Him this was no surprise, even though done by secret, unseen power. He was unsatisfied to appear to have healed her impersonally by His garments. It was as if He said to her: "I want you to see my face."

2. To confirm as hers what she had already taken, Jesus here states His own free, generous giving of it: "Go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mk. 5:34b). By so doing He removes any doubt in her mind about His willingness to heal and forgive her of any offense she may have caused Him by using the approach she did.
3. By lovingly restoring her to fellowship, love and usefulness, He opens the door for her to leave her secret admiration and become His disciple openly. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 627) remarks approvingly: "The Lord did not, as Pseudo-orthodoxy would prescribe it, disappoint her faith for the weakness of its manifestation. To have disappointed her faith, which was born of such high thought of Him, would have been to deny Himself." By addressing her, "**Daughter**," He renders this stranger, alone in the crowd, a member of His own spiritual family in fellowship with God (cf. Mt. 12:46-50). This tender, endearing term does not indicate whether she were older or younger than Jesus. It could be justly a friendly greeting by which He assures her of His own love and concern for her in contrast to her fear of His reproof.

Your faith has made you whole. (Other examples: Lk. 7:50; 17:19; 18:42; Ac. 3:16; 14:9) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 295) repeats what should be axiomatic in Christianity: that faith saves a man "not by the mere fact that he believes, but by that which it leads him to do." This woman, going only on what she had heard of Jesus, formulated this plan and carried it out, even though it involved great ignorance on her part about His mercy and willingness to help. But, even as Jesus clarified the issue, it was not her plan that saved her, but it was her plan that brought her to Jesus, who, on the basis of her faith, saved her. How much more can our faith save us as we follow Jesus' clearly revealed plan of salvation whereby we come to Him to be saved? Praise God for His mercy in not leaving us to formulate our own plans out of ignorance! Now we can mold our plans according to His gracious revelation.

How had her faith made her whole? Her subjective trust in an objective supernatural power caused her to bring herself into contact with that power. Many had touched Jesus that day (Mk. 5:31), but nothing happened to them, even though many had diseases just as obstinate and needing miraculous help as hers. Her faith and determination to express it singled her out, so Jesus healed her only. Other days there would be other people (Mt. 14:36), but this day there was but one woman who showed this faith.

Hē pístis sou sēsōkēn se is ambiguous. See the examples above cited in which this phrase ("Your faith has saved you.") is sometimes used with those whom Jesus had healed; at other times He says it to healthy, forgiven sinners. Perhaps Jesus deliberately chose this expression to convey two ideas instead of one: "Your faith has brought you both healing and forgiveness." Whatever offense she might have brought Jesus by secretly trying to take a blessing without His express approval or by defiling Him by her touch (according to her view of defilement), is all forgiven. But the emphasis here is on the healing, since the lady thought, "I shall be made well" (*sōthēsomai* is the same verb, *sōzein*, Jesus used to declare her salvation, *sēsōken*).

And the woman was made whole from that hour. Mark and Luke time her healing as taking place when she touched His robe, since she immediately felt the change in her body that the healing produced, a fact which she apparently related later (Lk. 8:47). Matthew's general statement (*apò tēs hōras ekeînēs*) must not be interpreted so as to contradict the others, as if the healing depended upon Jesus' words here related and not upon the release of healing power Jesus Himself noticed earlier (Lk. 8:46; Mk. 5:30), an impression

however distinctly conveyed by the RSV in that committee's choice of the word "instantly."

III. THE ROLE OF JESUS DECIDED

Jesus' journey, interrupted by the healing of the woman, was filled with delay that must have been agonizing to this father who "just knew" that every second counted. His understanding and faith could not rise to the challenge imposed by the many hindrances these must overcome. Just then, right at this extremely tense moment for Jairus, when the hurrying procession, bringing the Master to heal his daughter, had ground to a halt by seemingly endless delays, is about to get started again, right at that moment, the word came from his house that his worst fears are now reality: they are too late! (Mk. 5:35; Lk. 8:49) It would have taken almost superhuman effort to keep him from going into shock there, but Jesus' words provided just the needed psychological power to balance the effect of that crushing message and give him hope: "Do not fear; only believe and she shall be well" (Lk. 8:50; note here again *sōthēsetai*). Feel the irony of the situation revealed by the words of the messenger: "Your daughter is dead: why trouble the Teacher any further?" They had had faith enough to believe Jesus could heal the sick, but not enough to believe He could raise the dead. This practical unbelief on their part could become contagious, infecting also the ruler himself. This news drove his crisis of faith to the very limit. Perhaps the very confidence of Jesus' manner when He encouraged Jairus to believe, plus the fact that Jesus calmly resumed His journey to Jairus' house, gave the man respite from the pressure of the immediate disaster of the apparently unchangeable fact of his daughter's death. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 630) notes accurately the completely passive role that Jairus now plays from this point to the end. Whereas before, he had led Jesus toward the house, now Jesus takes complete charge of the whole scene, making on-the-spot decisions and giving orders. (Mk. 5:37-40; Lk. 8:51) Jairus' faith was threatened for its very existence, but Jesus would not despise or quench it. He was ministering also to Jairus in his greatest moment of need.

Jesus' role in the picture is no longer that of a Healer. If He continues another step further toward Jairus' house, He must do so as Victor over death itself. If He admits that the common sense course for Jairus is to cease troubling the Teacher, to let Him go His way, then Jesus will have quailed in face of death. His human contemporaries could have excused Him, for what other rabbi could challenge Death? However much we may have loved Him and honored His message,

we could never worship Him as complete Master over all problems that it is our lot as human beings to suffer. (Cf. Heb. 2:9, 14-18) The death notice was for Jairus a crisis in faith, but the somber message was even more for Jesus a crisis in His self-revelation.

IV. REASON FOR JOY DISPUTED (9:23, 24)

9:23 **And when Jesus came into the ruler's house**, He had already commanded nine of the Apostles to remain behind, bringing with Him only Peter, John and James. His purpose was obviously to keep the crowd under control and out of His way, since "He allowed no one to follow Him" (Mk. 5:37) or when He got to the house, "He permitted no one to enter with Him, except Peter, John and James and the father and mother of the maiden." (Lk. 8:51) His choice of the nine Apostles to remain with the crowd was perhaps to serve as an example of self-discipline. Physically, the nine men just by standing still easily blocked the passage to all who tried to follow Jesus. This first step was necessary in order for Jesus to secure the quiet and dignity He desired to surround the resurrection of Jairus' daughter.

When Jesus came into the ruler's house, He saw the flute-players and the crowd making a tumult. The funeral began even the same day as the death. The **flute-players** and **tumult** represent a different custom of mourning the dead than ours. Our custom demands silence of respect for the dead; theirs calls for release of pent-up emotions through loud mourning. This led naturally to the attitude that considered mourning more genuine, more deeply felt, the louder and more prolonged it was continued. But even human grief knows its natural limits unless it is artificially bolstered by sentimental music of hired musicians, as the flute-players here, or by the emotional reminiscences skillfully repeated by the semi-professional "wailing women." (Cf. 2 Chron. 35:25; Jer. 9:17-22; 16:5-9; Ezek. 24:15-24; Amos 5:16, 17 and perhaps also Acts 9:37-39) So when Matthew describes the funeral as a **tumult**, he is merely saying that it was a good funeral proceeding in good order according to the custom of the day. Mark and Luke describe the tumult as consisting of "weeping and loud wailing."

9:24 **He said, Give place.** (*anachōreite*). This command may be taken in two different ways, both of which could be Jesus' meaning:

1. "Stand back, make room!" This then is Jesus' request merely to pass through the crowd that simply by their presence now blocked the entrance to the room where Jairus' daughter lay.

2. But taken in its stronger sense "to leave, to withdraw," Jesus is saying nothing less than "You may leave now, folks: the funeral's over!" These shocking words call dramatic attention to what He is about to do.

Naturally, at this time all attention would be drawn from the mourning to the sudden return of the master of the house, Jairus, and the precipitate entrance of Jesus, for many in the house knew that Jesus had been sent for. They also knew that other messengers had been dispatched to Jairus to inform him of the death of the daughter, counselling him not to bother Jesus further. Now Jesus enters the room and literally takes over. The seeming imperiousness of His manner is only apparent because, besides this brusque command ("Depart"), He intentionally began speaking by pricking their curiosity: "Why do you make a tumult and weep? Do not weep; the child is not dead but sleeping." (Mk. 5:39; Lk. 8:52)

For the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. Patient with their ignorance of His power and His plans, He is giving them opportunity to react in quite another manner than they do. His enigmatic declaration was intended to stir them to reflection about His meaning. Thus, if they were disposed to respectful attention to Him and His purposes, they were about to become the witnesses of a resurrection from the dead. Instead they responded stupidly with scorn and insults, unable to see in His words anything more than obvious insensibility to the parents' tragedy in this moment of loss.

These words, however, morally commit Jesus to a position of gross imposture or else to one of highest integrity. For if the little girl were not really, literally dead, then Jesus must be charged with imposture, allowing to be believed what never occurred. The parents and disciples believed the daughter to be dead (Lk. 8:49; Mk. 5:35), but Jesus did nothing to correct that impression except to assert that she slept. Then upon raising her, He said nothing that would correct the distinct impression that He had just brought a person once actually dead, back to life.

Not dead but sleepeth are words, then, not intended to contradict the literal state of the little girl, but to correct the common view these people had of death. They had perhaps viewed her death as a cessation of existence for both body and soul (a view not unlike that held by the Sadducees), whereas Jesus affirms, contrarily, that she is very much alive elsewhere and can be recalled as easily as one is awakened out of sleep. Or perhaps they held that she was permanently dead—at least until the resurrection (a more Pharisean view)

and there was nothing now to do but resign oneself to that fact and mourn her loss. But Jesus is objecting that she is NOT dead permanently so much as asleep in death from which He shall wake her, (Other illustrations of death described as a sleep: Jn. 11:11-14; Ac. 7:60; I Cor. 15:6, 18; I Th. 4:13-17; 2 Pe. 3:4)

They laughed Him to scorn. This sentence has the greatest value as circumstantial evidence for the reality of the miracle that follows, since they evince the true psychological reaction of a qualified group of people sure both of the purpose of their wailing and of the apparent inappropriateness of Jesus' claim that the damsel was not dead. They were all more than sure that she was dead. (Lk. 8:53) This psychological reaction, though blamable from one standpoint (see above), is exactly what one would expect under the circumstances. The presence of the parents, who would be the last to surrender to the heart-rending conclusion that their only little lamb had gone, are proof against any supposition that she was in any state other than literal, physical death. (But even if it were a deep coma after whatever disease had so reduced the girl, as Barclay [*Matthew* I, 353] suggests, would she have been so quickly revived to full vigor and health? So it is impossible to remove the supernatural from this event.) No, her death was a fact the certainty of which these friends and neighbors thought it madness to doubt!

McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 85) with his usual clear insight, detects in this phrase ^B one of the best evidences for the authenticity of the entire account:

If it were a pretended death and revival, we would expect to see an anxiety on the part of Jesus to make it appear that the girl was dead, and a disposition on the part of the unbelievers present to question this fact. But the reverse is true: it is the unbelievers who insist that the girl is dead, while Jesus alone raises a question about it. Perhaps the chief object of the remark "She is not dead, but sleepeth," was to bring forth from the inmates of the house, who had the best opportunity to know the fact, a more emphatic affirmation that she was certainly dead.

Without intending to do so, then, these scorers among the mourners established this fact of a real resurrection from the dead beyond all doubt. By their scorn, in retrospect after the resurrection, they had shut their own mouths and, as a result, really shut the mouths of all future doubters of the reality of this marvellous resurrection.

Not dead but sleepeth. These words, that were intended to

stimulate joy and eager anticipation of the mighty act of God through the resurrection of Jairus' daughter, were disputed, scorned and rejected. Jesus had tried to communicate this hope to all in Jairus' house that day, but they failed to grasp it. This is fatal, for they missed seeing the great event that all mankind has longed to look into: *real resurrection from the dead*. They failed because Jesus' words were a bit difficult and they refused to rise to the challenge of understanding Him. They thought they were justly condemning Him, but by His choice of words, He had already let them judge and condemn themselves. He was not on trial: they were. (Study this same psychology of Jesus, Jn. 6:25-69.)

V. THE RESURRECTION OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (9:25, 26)

9:25 **The crowd was put forth** not only for the reasons suggested above, but also for the following:

1. Scorn and criticism sterilize the attention, drawing it away from the Father onto self-defense. Perhaps Jesus wanted to concentrate His own heart upon God who raises the dead, rather than waste time and dissipate energy in defending Himself or arguing further.
2. He desired not credulity, but quiet. Faith could come later on the basis of the evidence here produced, but people must be in a proper spirit to observe what he does. This calls for the dignity of silence, not the confusion and tumult of mourning. Jesus put the crowd outside (Mk. 5:40), not because He wanted an indispensable atmosphere of faith, as if disbelief could hinder the miracle.
3. He did not desire the publicity that would be certain to follow. The larger the group, the more difficult it would be to keep the matter quiet. For reasons for this attitude, see below on 9:26. This harmonizes perfectly with the strict injunction given the parents not to publish this miracle.
4. Perhaps the large group of professional mourners, some of them perhaps objecting out of self-interest, having been hired for the occasion, would have actually, physically hindered Jesus from, as they put it, "imposing upon the parents, since no one can raise the dead!" But, this suggestion is weak, since Jesus could have overpowered them by any manner He chose, had they attempted to stop Him.
5. Considering the temper of the crowd, Jesus' action assured the few chosen witnesses the best opportunity to observe what actually took place. This quiet enabled them to hear what

was said, so that they would know that what He did, He did not by magic but by authority. So doing, Jesus avoided misconceptions circulated by means of wild stories started by a mob of half-hysterical people who only thought they saw or heard this or that.

He entered in, i.e. into the room where the child was, taking five unimpeachable witnesses (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:51) These future Apostles needed to witness the fact in order to give a careful account of it later to the world. (Compare the account of Peter's raising Dorcas from the dead, Ac. 9:36-42, wondering what effect this resurrection had on Peter as he walked alone into the room where Dorcas lay dead!) The parents of all people could not be deceived or bribed to promote the publication of a falsehood regarding a matter that touched them so closely and so intimately.

He took her by the hand. To touch a corpse or be touched by a woman afflicted with a hemorrhage or to touch a leper (see on 8:3) would have involved Jesus in ceremonial defilement. But here, as always, He imparted cleansing, healing and life by His touch, removing all cause of defilement in the person He touched. He was the one true exception to the Law of defilement, that was written only for people without such supernatural powers, who, rather than helping those they touched, only became defiled themselves, leaving two defiled persons. Jesus always left two clean persons, whole, cleansed and alive.

The damsel arose when Jesus took her by the hand and called to her, just as He would if He were waking her up from sleep. But this was not sleep: "her spirit returned." (Lk. 8:55) On the basis of the above considerations, we have to conclude that this is a real resurrection. For Jesus, Lord of both nature and miracles, both sleep and death are no mysteries, for He has experienced both. As simply as Jairus had for twelve years gone in to awaken his daughter out of sleep, so Jesus instantly raised her out of death. For to Jesus, both the sleeping and the dead can be awakened. Who then is this who calls the dead to life? But no sooner had this twelve year old, now full of all the life and vigor, bounced out of bed and walked over to her amazed mother and daddy, than Jesus commanded them to provide her something to eat. (Mk. 5:43; Lk. 8:55). Why?

1. Jesus is so reasonable. He ordered her parents to give her, not the Law and the prophets, but food. "Jairus, here is your little sweetheart, now you take care of her: give her something to eat!" This marvelous Jesus has just robbed Death of its victim and yet still thinks about a meal for the little girl.

2. Seeing the parents overcome with amazement, Jesus may have commanded that bread be given her also to demonstrate that they were beholding no ghost, no apparition, but a real person, once dead, now returned to the concrete reality of human existence. (Cf. Lk. 24:41-43 and perhaps Ac. 10:41) Thus, this simple demand breaks the stunned, awed silence caused by this direct contact with the supernatural, bringing the on-lookers back down to the natural. Jesus could have provided miraculous bread too, but He required the parents to do their part by using natural means they had at hand.

9:26 **And the fame hereof went forth into all that land** despite all Jesus could do to keep this from happening. Some might wonder how He could have expected otherwise by the incredible tactics He used: He stopped a funeral, drove out the mourners, while His nine disciples kept another great crowd waiting for Him to return from the funeral at Jairus' house. (Mk. 5:24, 37) Human curiosity, about what took place in that bed room, could know no bounds, especially when Jairus' daughter reappeared later, alive and healthy! But Jesus forbade only Jairus and his wife to publish the story (Mk. 5:42; Lk. 8:56), since they especially were in positions of authority as eye-witnesses of good repute and would have been only too willing to spread the joyful tidings far and wide. What the other neighbors and bystanders do is no concern of Jesus, for He knows that if His own disciples and the parents do not spread the story, the sensation reported here by Matthew will die out. Some might object: Why bother to hush the story when it represents so powerful an evidence of Jesus' authority over death itself?

1. Because, unless the news is quieted, people could conceivably begin bringing Jesus requests for resurrection for all their dead. This would not only be unwise on their part, but it would further hinder Jesus' real ministry to earth. Men too often tried to use Jesus for selfish motives. He had not come to build up a healing ministry or raise all earth's dead yet, but to reveal God. His miracles of healing were to demonstrate God's compassion and identify Himself as God's Revealer. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 297) makes the interesting observation about how remarkable it is "that we read not of a single instance in which Jesus was requested to raise the dead: and the fact may be accounted for in part by this charge of privacy, indicating he did not wish to be importuned for this exercise of His power."

2. Because, unless the story is suppressed, political excitement could reach a fever pitch, since mistaken views of worldly messiahs would be attached to Jesus' name, blocking all progress for His spiritual work. Worse still, bloody riots could result as the patriots, primarily the Zealots, tried to force Jesus to be their king and lead them against the Romans.
3. Plummer (*Luke*, 238) suggests another reason: "It was given more probably for the parents' sake, to keep them from letting the effect of this great blessing evaporate in vain-glorious gossip. To thank God for it at home would be far more profitable than talking about it abroad."

Trench (*Miracles*, 113) sees an ascending scale in the glory of the three records of resurrection from the dead: here a girl just died; the son of the widow of Nain on the road for burial; then Lazarus already dead for four days. Then he continues: "Immeasurably more stupendous than all these, will be the wonder of that hour, when all the dead of old, who will have lain, some of them for many thousand years, in the dust of death, shall be summoned from and shall leave their graves at the same quickening voice (John 5:28, 29)."

FACT QUESTIONS

1. To what city did Jesus return from the freeing of the Gadarene demoniacs across the Sea of Galilee? How do you know this?
2. What was the position in the Jewish community occupied by Jairus?
3. Harmonize the accounts of Mark and Luke with that of Matthew in regard to the actual request of Jairus in relationship to the actual state of the little girl: was she living or dead? Did Jairus want Jesus to come to heal or to raise her?
4. List several other miracles that Jesus had accomplished in this city prior to this time which may have brought Jairus and the sick woman to their position of dependence upon Jesus to help them in this their critical hour.
5. Explain how the woman's faith healed her, showing how this harmonizes with the fact that it was Jesus' power that did it.
6. How did Jesus address the woman?
7. Describe the desperate case presented to Jesus by this woman, not only the physical malady but also the social, personal, religious and economic effects of her disease.
8. Describe her plan borne of desperation by which she hoped to be healed and how she carried it out.

9. Describe the scene changes from the first request of Jairus until Jesus actually arrived at Jairus' house.
10. Explain the presence of the flute players and the mourners so soon after the death of the maiden.
11. Explain the words of Jesus: "The little girl is not dead, just sleeping."
12. Was the little girl really dead? On what basis do you answer as you do?
13. How many persons actually witnessed the resurrection of Jairus' daughter? Name them.
14. Explain how it was possible for people actually to be expecting Jesus' return from Gergesa so as to be crowding around on the beach as He landed.
15. Describe the political situation in Galilee that renders comprehensible Jesus' requirement that people not tell others about His miracles.

Section 21

JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO TWO BLIND
MEN AND FREES A DUMB DEMONIAK

TEXT: 9:27-34

27. And as Jesus passed by from thence, two blind men followed him, crying out, and saying, Have mercy on us, thou son of David.
28. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.
29. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done unto you.
30. And their eyes were opened. And Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.
31. But they went forth, and spread abroad his fame in all that land.
32. And as they went forth, behold, there was brought to him a dumb man possessed with a demon.
33. And when the demon was cast out, the dumb man spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.
34. But the Pharisees said, By the prince of the demons casteth he out demons.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did these two blind men address Jesus as "Son of David"? What do you think they mean to imply by using the expression? Why not just call Him "Jesus of Nazareth" or something similar?
- b. Why did Jesus ask the blind men if they believed He was able to give them their sight? Would it have not been simpler just to heal them without this questioning?
- c. Why would Jesus forbid these men to tell of their healing?
- d. What do you suppose was the justification these men used for disobeying Jesus' clear orders?
- e. To what would you attribute the fact that Jesus' ministry appealed to a pair of old blind men here, some sick folk there, publicans and other sinners elsewhere, but was not received by the Pharisees? Was it because His evidence did not meet the critical investigation of these erudite scholars?
- f. Why did the Pharisees make such a violent charge as this statement that Jesus' power is attributable to some secret league with Satan? What motivated the charge? What could they have hoped to accomplish by voicing it?
- g. Why could not the Pharisees criticize Jesus' other miracles on the same basis, crediting them to the same satanic power?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus was on His way somewhere else, two blind men following along behind Him, shouting, "Take pity on us, Son of David!"

When Jesus had entered a house, these two came indoors too and approached Him. Jesus asked them, "Do you men believe that I have the power to make you see?"

"Yes, Lord," they said, "We do."

Then He touched their eyes with His fingers, saying as He did, "On the basis of your trust, the miracle will be done for you."

And suddenly their sight was restored. Then Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one hears about this!"

But as soon as they went outside, they spread this all over the countryside!

Later, as Jesus and His group were leaving, some people brought Him a dumb man who was demon-possessed. Jesus evicted the demon and immediately the man recovered his speech. Simply amazed, the onlookers remarked, "We have never seen anything like it in Israel!"

But the Pharisees growled, "He throws out these demons by secret agreement with Satan himself, the demons' leader!"

SUMMARY

En route somewhere Jesus encountered two blind men who sought healing. Seemingly ignoring their request, Jesus entered a house. Persistently, the two came in also. Jesus challenged their faith. Receiving a positive response, Jesus healed them and ordered secrecy. However they disobeyed by telling it everywhere. On another occasion Jesus cast out the demon from a dumb man, freeing him thus to speak. The crowds responded with amazed praise; the Pharisees responded by attributing Jesus' power to Satan's permission.

NOTES

9:27 **And as Jesus passed by from thence**, i.e. coming away from Jairus' house. **Two blind men followed him** as well as men deprived of their sight can follow. Perhaps they were led by friends as they make their appeal. This is one of several such requests made of Jesus (see Mt. 12:22; 20:30; 21:14; Jn. 9) among many alluded to (Lk. 4:18; 7:21, 22). Matthew's narrative of this and the following incidents seem almost devoid of color and significance, being related only in the barest of factual detail. But his purpose is very clear when this section is viewed in the context of the entire ninth chapter, in which he describes how opposition began to mount to Jesus' ministry.

1. Jesus was accused of blasphemy (9:2-8)
2. Then He was accused of immorality for receiving as intimate friends those whom no respected person would consider as intimate companions (9:9-13)
3. Thereafter the Lord was subtly accused of not being holy enough, since His disciples apparently with His approval did not follow those forms that expressed holiness (9:14-17)
4. When He tried to comfort the mourners, family and friends in Jairus' house, telling them the little girl was not dead, but sleeping, people accused Him of madness by scorning His revelation. (9:24)
5. Here, in an accusation less obvious, and certainly more subtle than the out-spoken remarks of others, is the attitude of the two blind men, when healed, that regards Jesus as anything less than a real Lord. They disobey His clear command. (See on 9:30)
6. Last, the Pharisees take up the jealous cry, accusing Jesus of being Satan's ally. (9:34)

In each case, Matthew has shown Jesus' masterful response to the accusations, except in these last two, unless verses 35-38 be so con-

strued. In the case of the unwanted publicity created by the healed blind men, there was little Jesus could do or say to deal with it, except plunge into more vigorous work to meet the needs of the people who came to Him as a result of His fame, which, in fact, He did (Mt. 9:35-38). In the case of the calumny raised by the Pharisees, Matthew has reserved a full and final answer for a later section (12:22-37), so he did not record any answer Jesus might have given here.

Crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, thou son of David. Although **Son of David**, taken as a title, was a then-current expression for the Christ, since the Messiah was to be **THE Son of David** *par excellence* (See Notes on 1:1; 12:23; 21:9, 15; 22:41-45), it may be fairly asked why, in light of the revolution-breeding implications of its use in that particular historic period, should Jesus permit these two blind men to follow Him crying out this obvious advertisement of His true identity. It may be that Jesus half hides, half reveals the exciting truth by not rebuking these men on the spot:

1. He permits the blind men to advertise His identity for Him, so as to suggest to all who hear them the conclusion to which all His life and preaching led.
2. But since He does not publicly accept this title as pronounced by them, rather forcing them to follow into private quarters, He did not here decide the issue. As a result, those, who would have been willing to start a bloody nationalistic revolution at the drop of a suggestion that He were the long-awaited Messiah, could not move into action. This is Galilee, hot-bed of the Zealots' movement (See Josephus, *Ant.* I, 1, 1 and 6; IV, 3, 9; 5, 1; *Wars*, VII, 8, 1 and Edersheim, *Life*, I, 237-242) Jesus could accept the title openly elsewhere away from Galilee and later on, as His life and ministry had already run its course. (See Mt. 15:22; 20:29-34 and parallels; 21:9, 15 as over against 12:23).

Leaving the question thus unresolved, the Lord gives Himself time and opportunity to reveal what kind of "Son of David" He really intended to be.

But the fact that these two blind men, who would presumably have lived outside the general circle of public activity, should make this appeal to Jesus as Messiah, certainly strongly suggests that the public sentiment is growing that Jesus may well be the great Son of David.

How correct a concept of Jesus' Messiahship did these men have in order to dare address Him in these terms? Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 358) observes that the usual occurrences of this title within the gospels as almost always by crowds or by people "who knew Jesus only, as it were, at a distance (Mt. 15:22; 20:30, 31; Mk. 10:47; 12:35, 36, 37)" This is so strongly felt by Edersheim (*Life*, II, 48, 49) that he felt constrained to regard this incident as having taken place in Gentile territory and at a much later period. It is true that, in the popular mind, this messianic title conjured up the great commander who would bring national glory, power, wealth and freedom to Israel. And, just as deeply implanted in the national consciousness of Israel was this hope of national greatness, just so far from their popular hopes was the opinion that the Messiah was to be King over a spiritual reign in men's hearts. How far these blind men shared these views cannot be known. One thing is known from the available information recorded by Matthew: Jesus did NOT praise them for their great insight into His identity. They probably came to Him with a very inadequate concept of who He was and what He intended to tell the world, and YET He helped them. **Have mercy on us, thou Son of David**, is still their expression of trust in Him as Messiah and that He, as Christ, could restore their sight.

Have mercy on us is all that is written down of their appeal, a fact which suggests that they humbly left to Jesus the complete right to bless them as He chose, even as the leper. (8:2-4)

9:28 **And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him.** Jesus' apparently indifference to their pleas puts their faith in Him to several rigorous tests: they must, by some means, follow Him if they are to have the answer to their prayers. In forcing the blind men into a private, face-to-face confrontation with Him, the Lord made them confront a personal decision about Him they perhaps had not yet made, even though their desire for sight had already caused them to hurdle other difficulties. Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 359) comments:

It is the law of the spiritual life that sooner or later a man must confront Jesus alone. It is all very well to take a decision for Jesus on the flood tide of emotion of some great gathering, or in some little group which is charged with spiritual power. But after the crowd, a man must go home and be alone; after the fellowship he must go back to the essential isolation of every human soul; and what really

matters is not what a man does in the crowd, but what he does when he is alone with Christ.

Does Jesus foresee that they will disobey Him when once He grants their request? Their subsequent actions show that He was fully justified in testing them even further than He did.

Into the house causes us instinctively to ask, which house, since no special house has been mentioned since Jesus left that of Jairus. Why the article, **the** house? (Cf. Mk. 7:24 without the article.) Is it the house where Jesus normally resided in Capernaum when at home (Mk. 2:1)? It may be that Matthew does not regard the identification of the house as important, since his emphasis is to show the blind men's determination to get to Jesus despite the opposition of their own blindness and the obstacle of Jesus' not helping them by His not letting them catch up with Him on the road. (Cf. Mt. 20:32).

Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? Why ask a question which has so obvious an answer?

1. Because the Lord probably suspects the depth of information that represents the foundation of their acclamation of Him as Messiah. It may well be that these blind men had taken up a popular opinion about Him, simply because everyone had begun to think it. In this case, He demands that they sound the depth of their personal understanding and the genuineness of their own dependence upon Him as Messiah.
2. This question could almost be an exclamation of surprise and wonder, since these two blind men, unable to see the miracles for themselves, must necessarily depend upon the eye-witness reports of others. In a sense, then, they stand in the same relationship to the miracles of Jesus as all whom Jesus blessed who "have not seen, and yet believed." (Jn. 20:29) We stand in our own century, blinded by the intervening centuries necessarily relying upon the evidence provided us by those who saw Him. (1 Jn. 1:1-4; 2 Pe. 1:16) If these blind men believed, who had so little opportunity to know the evidence at first-hand, then this consideration, as McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 85) notes, "shows, on the one hand, the abundance of the evidence, and on the other, the obduracy of those who could see and still would not believe."
3. Lenski (*Matthew*, 378) affirms another purpose behind Jesus' question:

to turn the thoughts of these blind men away from any political Messianic ideas regarding Jesus and to direct them to the divine power and grace found in him. The emphasis is not merely on "do you believe" but equally on the object clause, "that I am able to do this." One who is able to restore sight by means of a touch and a word is far greater than any national king, however grand his reign may be.

4. Jesus had already given many evidences of His divine identity through His miracles, proofs upon which sturdy faith could be founded. With this progress in the development of His public image, He could begin to demand that that trust in Him be confessed.

They say unto him, Yea, Lord. They had already shown great faith and determination just to address Him as the Christ and persist in following this far. They had also shown great courage so openly to approach Him in these terms, since not everyone at this time acknowledged Jesus as Messiah and many never would. So it took great boldness of spirit to speak out and risk their future happiness with this Son of David. They may have been blind to this world, but they were not blind to spiritual reality. Now that Jesus puts this direct question to them regarding their personal conviction, they confess the persuasion of their heart.

9:29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done unto you. Jesus is saying: "Since your confidence in my power to give you sight is unreserved, I will exert that power unreservedly and restore your vision! I will match your great faith with great power." **He touched their eyes,** not because this contact was necessary, since He had used other methods on other occasions. (Cf. Mk. 8:23, 25; Jn. 9:6, 7; sometimes on other sicknesses, He spoke a word at a distance and made no gesture whatever) These blind men, who could see no other gesture of Jesus, can feel this touch and know that the power actually came from the Lord Himself. He permitted them to feel the surge of power that His will exerted: what a wonderful revelation of His identity so well suited to blind men!

9:30 And their eyes were opened and the first person they saw was Jesus! In this splendid double blessing is revealed Jesus' mercy that removes from their hearts the effects of what had probably seemed to these men an unyielding denial of their earlier pleas. In that instant of immediate, perfect sight, these two men now see

justified all they had ever thought and said about Jesus: He is truly the Christ. But what are they to do about this new-found knowledge of which they themselves are now the witnesses? How can they show their gratitude enough?

And Jesus strictly charged them. The verb *embrimáomai*, here translated "strictly charged," is an intriguing word which conjures up a surprising picture of Jesus at this point. Arndt and Gingrich (254) discuss the word:

In Aeschylus and others in the sense "to snort." As an expression of anger and displeasure in Lucian . . . In Aquila's translation of Psa. 7:12(11); Symmachus on Is. 17:13; LXX on Lam. 2:6. With the dative of person: "to scold, censure" . . . Mk. 14:5; "warn sternly" Mk. 1:43; Mt. 9:30.

See also Hendriksen, *John* on Jn. 11:33. Since hardly anyone Jesus warned ever obeyed Him, He had good reason to be severe! Why should He begin so immediately and so vehemently to warn them? Could the Master see already rising in their breast that exuberance of praise that defied being limited?

See that no man know it. This is their only commission from Him who had restored them light and life, joy and usefulness, taken them from their dark world to revel in the color and beauty of all that pleases on this earth. Jesus could have required so much more of them, but He did not charge them a thing but their silence. (See on 8:4 and 9:27; other instances: Mt. 12:16; Mk. 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, all of which occurred in Galilee or in Decapolis near the Lake of Galilee. As in the former instances (8:4 and 9:26), Jesus' words are directed to the persons principally involved. These men, then, are not to go around proclaiming the news of their healing. This is not a command for them to go into hiding, so that the facts could not be absolutely known, since, it is presumed, the family and immediate acquaintances would come to know what had been done for them. All that Jesus intended was the opposite of what the men eventually did!

The Lord wisely forbade them to speak openly about their marvellous cure, since He must keep His own movement well in hand. Should these healed men now begin broadcasting His excellencies, even as they had arrested attention by addressing Him as the long-expected Messiah, popular excitement could grow into a bloody uprising of nationalistic Judaism against Rome. Other reasons may have been:

1. Their ignorant concept of the Messiah, if broadcast, would stimulate others who shared that concept to try to force Him

into their mold without ever understanding what kind of Christ He was. These "busy babblers" proved how little they really knew about the Christ whose Word is law! While walking the tight-rope between the various mistaken views of His ministry held by all who knew Him, Jesus knew that this was not the moment to proclaim His Messiahship openly, nor was it the moment to explain in detail to these beginners in faith the true nature of His Messiahship. It would but bring them more confusion. Hence, silence on their part was the only alternative open to them. If they really accepted Him as the mighty Son of David, they would have to trust Him to know what He was doing by requiring silence, where they certainly felt publicity to be in order.

2. A second reason for Jesus' prohibition so passionately expressed here was the fear, fully justified by the subsequent events, that His ministry should be hindered and frustrated by excited crowds, spiritually unable or unwilling to grasp what He must reveal to them about the REAL Kingdom of the Son of David.
3. A third reason lay in the insight of Jesus Himself into His own capacity for temptation: few men can live with success. What a truly human temptation to bow the knee before Satan, in order to be able to claim even just this one kingdom of the world, over which He could be "the Son of David" (cf. 4:10; 16:23). The indignant earnestness with which He warns these blind men, then, means "If you really respect me and appreciate what I have done for you, then do not destroy me by praising me." Praise is next to impossible to fight; accusations, yes, attacks, certainly, but sincerely meant adoration based on good evidence is useless to combat. But praise can destroy, however honestly meant, when it leads the person, who is the object of its worship, to be anything other than what is his best, his highest. Yes, Jesus had a superior character because He did not seek men's praise, but He also took pains to remove the temptation to enjoy it whenever it led Him away from that one goal, that one duty to establish David's Kingdom by way of the cross.

9:31. **But they went forth and spread his fame in all that land.** But they (*hoi dé*) is an express contrast to the strict prohibition of Jesus, that precedes this sentence. Matthew sees their action as contrary to what Jesus had told them to do. This action

of theirs is disobedience for which they are greatly to blame. If they had had real respect for Jesus, as much as they had faith to be healed by Him, they should have respected His will in the matter. Despite their joy and devotion and perfectly understandable desire to praise Jesus before men, yet He had strictly warned them to be silent. The seeming unreasonableness of Jesus' commands or statements, as man looks at them, can never be argued as a reason for refusing to render whole-hearted submission. That enthusiasm that bleats, "But Jesus could not have meant what He said . . ." is SIN! This is further proof of the fallacy of following the leadership of one's emotions entirely in reference to one's obedience to God. These blind men were much too exhilarated by their healing to believe Jesus had meant what He said. Joy felt because of God's gracious blessing does not ever exempt anyone from obedience. (See Ro. 2:4-6; Lk. 6:35; notes on Mt. 5:45)

The fame that spread in all that land was shallow, ignorant praise for which neither Jesus nor those who understand Him could rejoice. Edersheim sagely sees that (*Life*, II, 50)

The acclamations of an excited Jewish crowd were as incongruous to the real Character of the Christ, and as obstructive to the progress of His Kingdom, as is the outward homage of a world which has not heart-belief in His power, nor heart-experience of His ability and willingness to cleanse the leper and to open the eyes of the blind.

Even, as then, to call Jesus "the Son of David" with the inadequate or entirely wrong meaning behind those words was "damning Him with faint praise," so now, those, who praise Jesus without surrendering their hearts to Him, are but deceiving themselves, hoping to be part of His eternal kingdom, which, when viewed according to their concept, does not exist, any more than the kingdom of David as the Jews thought of it ever existed beyond the popular Jewish imagination of that era.

9:32 **And as they went forth**, i.e. just as the two formerly blind men left the house in which Jesus had healed them. **Behold, there was brought to him a dumb man possessed with a demon.** Is there any connection between this latter appeal to Jesus and the case of the blind men? It may well be that these formerly blind men began to proclaim their healing right among the people standing around in the streets (cf. 9:33b). Had the multitudes heard what the two blind men had called Jesus before their marvellous healing? Did these two men, now healed, and more convinced than ever that Jesus is truly "the Son of David," repeat this wonderful title in

their recitation of their healing? It might just well be that the solicitous friends of the dumb demoniac are among the first to begin making appeal to Jesus, having been excited to action by the joyous exclamations of the formerly blind.

A dumb man possessed with a demon. It is usually assumed by most commentators that the man was speechless because the demon had made him dumb, an assumption based on the observation that when the demon was cast out, the man regained the use of his speech. This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that the effect of demon-possession was not always the same (See on 8:28—9:1). The evidences for the reality of this demon-possession as a real, supernatural cause for the phenomenon, mentioned by Lewis and Booth (*PHC*, XXII, 236, 237), are:

1. Something in the evident sense of oppression on the part of the sufferer that could not be classed as madness;
2. Something about the strange persistency of his inability to speak inexplicable on other grounds;
3. Something in the complete absence of anything in his physical makeup that would suggest failure there;
4. Something in the utter absence of failure in his mental faculties that could account for his condition.
5. There were none present who doubted the cause as being supernatural:
 - a. The multitudes accepted it as demon-possession, since they are recorded as being so greatly impressed with the casting out of the demon by Jesus.
 - b. These critical cynics, the Pharisees, did not doubt it, rather, they would have been only too glad to have been able to ascribe the poor victim's condition to anything else than demonic possession, had they thought that they could have sustained their case. Rather than deny by superior evidence what the people commonly regarded as demon-possession, the Pharisees could only admit the facts as stated and deny the implication that Jesus was Master of Satan.
 - c. So all eye-witnesses concur that this was a true, significant case of demon-possession.

9:33 **And when the demon was cast out, the dumb man spake.** It is easy to imagine the tension as Jesus commanded the demon to depart. All ears would be listening for the first words of this victim. Perhaps as he began talking, he alone spoke, since all would be listening to hear that voice so long silent. It was not long,

however, that all remained silent, as their surprise, wonder and conviction drew forth from them shouts of praise and admiration for Jesus.

And the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never seen in Israel. This was probably not all that they were saying either. Were the crowds beginning to echo the words of the former blind men: "Can this be the Son of David" (Cf. 12:23 and the notes there; Jn. 7:31) Or are these words, the only ones written down, merely the reflection of discretion felt necessary by the multitudes in view of the menacing presence of the Pharisees? It would not do, after all, to offend these august gentlemen! But, as Matthew notes below, no discretion could hide this honest admiration nor prevent offense to the religious leaders.

It was never so seen in Israel. This was literally true, since there had never been in Israel's long history such a vast collection of wonderful evidences of the presence of God with His people. This appraisal of this continuous succession of miracles is not only that of the crowds: it is the conclusion of Matthew too. He has been patiently recording one striking miracle after another (chapters 8, 9). But rather than cumber or mar his writing with his own views, he lets the spontaneous praise of these bystanders express the joy of HIS heart and pride in His Savior.

But even with this remarkable expression of astonishment of the multitudes, let it not be forgotten that even they too grew accustomed to them. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 86) is right to point out that

With every new variety of miracles there came fresh surprise among the people. After seeing a few sick persons cured, they naturally ceased being surprised at cures of sickness; but when they saw this dumb man restored to speech, they were almost as much surprised as if they had seen no previous miracles. The range of fresh miracles, however, necessarily had a limit, and therefore miracle working, as a means of impressing men, had to be of temporary duration. A permanent continuation of miracles would have robbed them of their value by making them common.

9:34 But the Pharisees said, By the prince of the demons casteth he out demons. But the Pharisees as a phrase, stands in direct opposition to the response of the multitudes. Is it possible that Matthew is summarizing the general effect of these miracles of chapters eight and nine, and not merely the immediate effect wrought by the casting out of the demon? The striking similarity between the report of these two responses and the report

later given (12:22-24) would lead us to think that Matthew's inclusion here refers only to this last section and not to the whole of the larger section. Be that as it may, it is nevertheless interesting that our author should conclude these two chapters with the polarizing of opinions into two fundamental groups: the multitudes of common people and those pillars of Jewish orthodoxy, the Pharisees. Why he should single out these latter, over against all other sects or groups in Judaism, is explicable since:

1. The Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus was more pronounced: they busied themselves the most to frustrate the progress of His movement.
2. The Herodians could not be too excited about Jesus, since He had deliberately ignored the Herods, neither praising nor censuring them.
3. The Sadducees were too much interested in political maneuverings at Jerusalem to disturb themselves greatly about the spiritual emphasis of Jesus.
4. Why not the Zealots? Perhaps, they hoped yet to find in Jesus their revolutionary hero and leader, hence they too would not so accuse Him.

By the prince of demons casteth he out demons. This charge is almost funny, since it represents the best efforts of the concentrated attention of the Pharisees to arrive at an answer regarding Jesus' miracles. These frustrated sectarians answered only the miracles connected with demon-possession, since they could not reply to any of the others. This charge arises out of sheer spite and jealousy. It had probably been years since multitudes of people had ever gotten this stirred up about a Rabbi and THIS Rabbi was no Pharisee!

In this age of scientific inquiry, it is well to ask why Jesus' ministry appealed to a couple of old blind men, a few infirm people, some fishermen, tax-collectors and harlots, but was not received by the great body of religious authorities and acknowledged scholars in Israel, especially the Pharisees. Was it because His evidence did not meet the critical investigation of these erudite and reverend doctors? On the contrary, for in their own words of this text, they confess: **He casts out demons.** The FACT they could not deny upon the most minute investigation. Their only objection lay in the INTERPRETATION of the meaning of the phenomenon observed as fact. Why did they then attribute a different interpretation to the facts than did the common people?

They had a philosophical system that boxed God into dimensions they could control by manipulation of their theology. But Jesus brought Israel a picture of God that was larger than their system, unhampered by their theology, free of their prejudices. And worse yet, for them, His credentials were impeccable—just a little too perfect, since if He were right about God—if His religion were the only real one—then they were wrong and had been wrong for centuries. There could be only one who could produce such wonderful signs whereby "the very elect themselves" could be deceived into leaving the carefully handed-down traditions: Satan. These Pharisees could see clearly, as many church members unfortunately have never learned, that to come to God through Jesus Christ meant to confess their sins, their false theology, their selfish pride, their hypocrisy exactly as Jesus exposes them for what they really are. If Jesus is right, then all their righteousness is sin, their theology false, their pride unwarranted and their hypocrisy exposed. But these men had not the slightest intention to change or be changed: it was much easier to retaliate than repent!

The great guilt of this accusation lies in its typically Pharisaic attitude: there is no evidence here of any sympathy for the freed victim, no word of praise or thankfulness to God. We see only a determination not to admit the true force of Jesus' miracles, if possible, even while admitting the facts of the case. Any conclusion is better than that which would glorify Jesus or support His movement!

Matthew, whose Gospel contains one of the finest refutations of this slander, must have included this incident without comment here to show how early the storm-clouds began to gather on the horizon of Jesus' career. Jesus' refusal to answer this calumny on this occasion may be interpreted as a tactic whereby He chose not to dignify their lie to the level of a serious charge that even needed refutation. Instead of accepting the obvious implications of His divine credentials, the Pharisees, emboldened by His meekness in refusing to defend Himself against defamation of this charge, and having nothing of real substance to urge against Him, repeated this libel until He had to answer it or default to them. For that fuller discussion of this charge and Jesus' answers, see on 12:22-37.

This amazed wonder on the part of the common people, as well as the maliciousness of the Pharisees, is not so surprising, after all. This difference in reactions towards Jesus is perfectly to be expected due to the measurable difference in their sense of need. The deeper this sense of need is felt, the more appreciative the people felt toward Jesus. The more self-sufficient the beholder, the less Jesus would

be needed or wanted. Woe to him who no longer feels his need for Jesus!

Matthew's report of this contrast (9:33, 34) throws into crisis OUR conscience. As we serve Him our wills remain free, since even His message carried no conviction to the prejudiced mind. With Morgan (*Matthew*, 98) let us zealously inquire with what attitude we listen and study Jesus' word, for it is very possible for prejudice and pride to blind us to the meaning of our King.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what general area did these two blind men live? Connect this section with what immediately precedes, showing where they probably lived.
2. What did the blind men call Jesus? Why use this term?
3. Describe Jesus' method in dealing with these two blind men.
4. What had made the man, who appears in the second part of the text, dumb?
5. State what the Bible actually reveals about demon-possession.
6. What was the reaction of the crowds when Jesus evicted the demon? What were their actual words?
7. What explanation did the religious leaders give for Jesus' power to cast demons out?
8. Although Jesus later gave full, detailed rebuttal of this charge made by the Pharisees, how did Jesus respond to the slander at the time?
9. What kind of opposition had the Pharisees brought Jesus during His ministry up to this time?
10. What is proved about Jesus by the fact that He can heal the sick and cast out demons?
11. State at least two good reasons why Jesus required the blind men to be silent about their healing.

Section 22

JESUS EVANGELIZES GALILEE AND SHARES HIS VISION WITH HIS DISCIPLES

(Parallel; Mark 6:6b)

TEXT: 9:35-38

35. And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.
36. And when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd.
37. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few.
38. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Have you ever been frustrated in your Christian work by the fact that there is too much to be done but too few workers? What did you do about it?
- b. Is there any advice that can be drawn from this text, by way of application, that would clarify the mission of the Church today? If so, what advice do you see there?
- c. In what way are the people in Galilee—yes, even the people of our world—like so many "sheep without a Shepherd"?
- d. How long do you think we ought to continue to pray for more workers?
- e. Do you believe that Jesus' command to pray for more workers, originally required of the Apostles, should be obeyed by His followers today? If so, on what basis? If not, why not?
- f. What do you see as the strategy behind Jesus' actions revealed in this text? Or, how does Jesus reveal Himself in this Scripture as the Master Strategist? What is that strategy?
- g. If you conclude that we should pray this prayer that Jesus required of his followers during His earthly ministry, then how far should we go in helping God to answer our prayers by preparing workers ourselves?
- h. If we pray for workers to be sent out to work for God, what is apt to happen? Can you conscientiously pray a prayer in the realization of which you are unwilling to participate?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus traveled about Galilee, stopping in all the cities and villages. There He taught in their synagogues and announced the good news about God's Kingdom. He also healed people who had all kinds of

illnesses. The sight of the crowds who came to Him filled Him with compassion for them. They reminded Him of sheep without a shepherd.

Then He challenged His disciples, "This harvest is plentiful enough; the problem is that the laborers are scarce. So, you must pray to the Lord, whose harvest it is, asking Him to send out more workers into His fields to work!

SUMMARY

Jesus toured Galilee making stops to teach in all the cities and villages. He healed all kinds of sick folk. He was motivated by His compassion to help them, because they were lost sheep—everyone of them. Then He engaged His Apostles in a prayer offensive to tackle the problem of too much work to be done by too few workers.

NOTES

I. A REVIEW OF THE REMARKABLE, RAPID REACHING OF THAT REGION (9:35)

9:35 And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages.

Is this a third missionary tour of Galilee, as many harmonists suppose, or is this Matthew's rhetorical device for recalling to the mind of the reader the principle point he has been making since 4:23? In the intervening chapters he has given magnificent illustrations of what he meant exactly by preaching, i.e. the Sermon on the mount (chaps. 5-7) and representative miracles (chaps. 8 and 9). He has now finished these examples, so summarizes this Galilean ministry again in the same terms.

The only verbal differences in Greek between Mt. 4:23 and 9:35 are two:

1. *tàs póleis pásas kai tàs kómas for en hólē tē Galiláia*
2. The addition of *en tō laō* in 4:23, which even some late MSS have also in 9:35. Otherwise these two passages are verbally identical in every respect, even to the significant use of the imperfect tense in the principle verb *periēgen*, "he was in the process of going around," and the present participles for all other verbs dependent upon the principal verb. The usual chronological representations of Jesus' various evangelistic tours divide them thus: the first, Mt. 4:23-25; Mk. 1:35-39; Lk. 4:42-44; the second, Lk. 8:1-3; the third, this one here, Mt. 9:35; Mk. 6:6b. However, in every case but one (Mk. 1:39 about which there is even some doubt in the MSS) the authors

all use the imperfect tense, a phenomenon which suggests that they merely intend to picture Jesus as constantly on the move and that His one, continuous tour of Galilee was either illustrated or else interspersed by the particular incidents narrated throughout this general period. This continuity, then, is to be interpreted as "the Great Galilean Campaign" divided up into successive journeys by returns to Capernaum or by trips to Jerusalem for the feast. This sense of continuity is probably what induces Matthew to use almost verbally identical expressions to describe what should probably be thought of as two separate journeys. Thus, this is both a third tour of Galilee as well as his rhetorical device for signalling a change, from the material that he has just concluded, to a new development in Jesus' ministry: the preparation and commission of the Twelve to labor in evangelism.

All the cities and the villages, i.e. of Galilee. Not only is this a picture of Jesus' personal evangelistic labors, but also as Morgan (*Matthew*, 100) paints it, "this picture of God is that of a Man Who went . . . and looked at the people; and what He saw made His whole inner physical life . . . move and burn." He did not merely demand that people come to Him during certain office hours; He went to them. **Teaching in their synagogues**, because there would be a ready-made audience available to Him. (Cf. Illustrations in Lk. 4:16-37 and notes on 4:23.) **Preaching the gospel of the Kingdom** speaks of the content of His proclamation: "God is still on the throne, but His Kingdom to come is different than you suspect!" It is not reasonable to suppose that Jesus even once announced Himself as Heaven's King or heralded the beginning of God's Messianic Reign, due to the complete misunderstanding people had of these grand truths. What is more likely is the supposition that Jesus hammered away at the true character—spiritual, not national,—of God's Kingdom. To those who awaited the redemption of Israel on spiritual terms (cf. Lk. 2:25, 38; 23:51), Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom's soon arrival would be "gospel" in its best sense, good news. To those who hoped only for the restoration of materialistic national glory, Jesus' message, however exciting at first, could not but prove disappointing as people began to understand that He had no plans that harmonized with their selfish dreams. **Healing all kinds of disease and sickness** summarizes the evidences He offered of His divine identity and consequent authority. His miracles were evidence that God's kingdom had arrived in this respect also, since the presence of sickness and disease is

contrary to normality. Jesus' control over these abnormalities, then, proclaimed God's control in the natural world at any moment He cared to exercise that dominion.

This intensive activity is Jesus' counterattack mounted against all the opposition to His claims drawn in sharp relief by Matthew in chapter nine. Rather than be cowed by the opposition, Jesus plunged into more vigorous evangelistic activity. He had been accused of blasphemy (9:2-8), of hob-nobbing with the scum of society (9:13), of not being holy enough (9:14-17), of folly (9:24), of being less than a real Master (9:31) and of being in league with Satan (9:34). He had answered all of the accusations brilliantly and with power. But He knows that the slight opposition He had then faced must necessarily grow. He knew also that He must gain as much time as possible, bringing as many people as possible to firm confidence in Him, before that inevitable showdown with the religious leaders which must conclude with the cross. This intensive one-man ministry resulted in great crowds deeply aroused: the attention of all northern Israel, at least, is focused upon Jesus of Nazareth. He has succeeded in getting a hearing.

II. THE RATIONALE OF A RESTLESS REDEEMER WHO REALISTICALLY RECOGNIZES THE REASON FOR THIS RECEPTION (9:36)

9:36 **But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd.** The people crowding around Jesus are the natural result of His evangelistic work which promoted wide-spread popular interest in His ministry. What Matthew repeats here, he has already noticed earlier, i.e. the growing evidence of success Jesus is enjoying in His effort to call national attention to Himself and His message. (Cf. 4:25; 8:18) But getting a hearing only is never sufficient, as important as that may be. One must get His message across convincingly to those ready to hear. And Jesus knows that these multitudes probably have not the slightest idea what He is trying so desperately to say to them. He knows that their prejudices, their ignorance, their background and training, their mistaken longings and selfish desires will shut out much of His message. Thus the Lord faces the greater necessity now of multiplying the efficiency of His means of communication, in order by all means to communicate His message more often and in more different ways. This would result in the dissemination of His information about the kingdom in

ways that would succeed in getting past some of the closed doors of prejudice and ignorance of people too far away to be helped personally. This necessity to render His ministry more efficient is required not only because of the multiplying numbers of people with whom He must talk, but more especially due to their condition.

But when we talk of Jesus' increasing the efficiency of His ministry, we imply that there was something lacking, inadequate or inefficient about it. But this very presence of the crowds raises a problem of tactics for the Lord, since He had already chosen, by virtue of the incarnation, to be just one Man in one place at a time. Though He was the great God, yet when He humbled Himself to be born as a little Jewish baby in Bethlehem, He whom the heaven of heavens could not contain, was deliberately limiting Himself to be just one Man in one place. But the obvious application of a principle of natural physics, He could not be in two places at the same time, much less in seven cities simultaneously evangelizing each one. But, by simply multiplying Himself, through the sharing of His vision, His authority and His message with His Apostles, He could accomplish seven times the work He was then accomplishing. (See on 10:1; 11:1 and compare Mk. 6:7).

But who were these **multitudes**? They consisted not only of the lonely, distressed, sick, poor common people for whom any generous soul could have a place in his heart. Also in that crowd were suspicious Herodians, hypocritical Pharisees, wealthy Sadducees, monkish Essenes, greedy, grasping publicans, perhaps spies of Herod and informers for Pilate, prostitutes and other sinners—sinners for whom the average person would probably have a trace of contempt, for whom **NONE** would willingly give his life on a cross! (Cf. Ro. 5:6-11) Here we feel the striking difference between Jesus of Nazareth and any other man or angel: He feels deeply, even though He sees clearly, the weakness and failure and consequent need of every man. He understands that all that is unlovely, despicable or revolting in any person, is but a good reason for His helping that man. It is comparatively easy for any normal humanitarian to feel compassion for certain classes of sufferers, like mothers or children, the poor or the homeless. But to be moved to action with compassion for heterogeneous humanity with its vast mixture of loves and hates, its diversified backgrounds, its wealth and poverty, its conflicting sentiments, its tensions, its joys, its opposite ideas about God and truth, is to be a Jesus. But is it not to become a Jesus that He came to call us? (Cf. Ro. 8:29; Phil. 2:1-5) **He saw the multitudes** for what they really were and **YET** He

felt a strong desire to relieve them from all that they suffered. A superficial observer, looking at the crowds, would never have seen what Jesus saw. One might have seen those people as irresponsible sheep who have gotten themselves lost and deserve whatever fate awaited them or perhaps just a frustrating lot of tiring field work, but not so Jesus. The difference? He had a Shepherd's heart: the harvest was His.

He was moved with compassion, as Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 363f) puts it, by our pain and sickness (Mt. 14:14), our blindness (Mt. 20:34), by our sorrow (Lk. 7:13), by our hunger (Mt. 15:32), by our loneliness (Mk. 1:41), by our bewilderment (here, also Mk. 6:34). **Compassion** means mercy, since, in strict justice, "there is no reason in man that God should save; the need is born of His own compassion. No man has any claim upon God. Why, then, should men be cared for? Why should they not become the prey of the ravening wolf, having wandered from the fold?" (Morgan, *Matthew*, 99)

Because they were distressed (*eskylmēnoi*; Arndt-Gingrich, 765: "wearied, harassed, troubled, bothered, annoyed;" cf. Lk. 7:6; 8:49; Mk. 5:35) **and scattered** (*erimmēnoi* from *rhiptō*. Arndt-Gingrich, 744: "1. *throw* in a manner suited to each special situation . . . 2. With no connotation of violence: *put* or *lay down*, lying down, lying on the ground or floor . . . of the crowds of people, Mt. 9:36, of animals lying on the ground.") **Scattered** sums up graphically the picture of shepherdless sheep lying here and there, having been thrown about by many diverse forces. This is their condition that moved the compassion of Jesus: their very weakness, their unworthiness, their unreadiness to meet God. What Matthew fairly shouts to any Jewish heart (and to any Gentile who has looked into the Jewish Bible!) is this: "Jesus has the heart of the great, long-awaited David, the great Shepherd!" (Cf. Isa. 40:10, 11; Jer. 23:3-8; 31:10; Ezek. 34:11-31; 37:24) **Harassed and helpless** is the picture of people perplexed, oppressed and troubled by the impossible obligations of current Judaism, confused by the contradictory claims of the various theological debating societies that left them groaning under the weight of restraints and duties of "religion." These are people who hold confused ideas about the Kingdom of God, the King and their duty. They have vague longings, aroused by the prophets, John the Baptist and now by Jesus Himself, yet they are ignorant about how or where they can satisfy this yearning. Even this self-inflicted anguish, for which Israel was personally responsible, excited Jesus' pity. Were the paradoxical words

of Isaiah (53:6) in Jesus' mind as He looked at these lost human beings?

All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way.

Each one thinks his case is peculiar; all however are getting lost in droves!

As sheep not having a shepherd. But had they no shepherds? Rather, had they not HUNDREDS of them? Historically, yes, and good ones too! Moses, the prophets and many righteous men had ministered to Israel, given their witness and challenged them to leave their sins. (Nu. 27:17; Ps. 77:20; Isa. 63:11) But just as recently as the later prophets, Israel had been willingly misguided, deceived and betrayed by men who served their own interest. (Jer. 23:1-40; 50:6ff.; Ezek. 34:1-10; Zech. 10:2, 3) Then when the true prophetic voice was finally silenced by the rejection and murder of the last of God's servants, Israel was left to her fate under the shepherding of thieves, robbers and hirelings. (Cf. Jn. 10:1, 8-13) Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 364ff.) summarizes this tragedy,

They were shepherds that had nothing to offer the common people longing for truth. The Scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees and priests, who should have been giving men strength to live, were bewildering men with subtle arguments about the Law, which had no help and comfort in them. These orthodox teachers had neither guidance, comfort nor strength to give. When they should have been helping men to stand upright, they were bowing them down under the intolerable burden of the Scribal Law.

This deeply felt compassion of Jesus is born of His great vision: tired lost sheep; the waiting harvest. But He is not lost in visions and dreaming. These tensions must be resolved: there must be shepherds! He must call reapers! But these two colossal visions are not exactly parallel but two halves of the same truth. If there is any certain emphasis to each, it is this: the vision of the sheep without a Shepherd is the image of man's need met by God, while the vision of the waiting harvest require that God's need for reapers be met by men.

Another interesting thought suggested by Lewis and Booth (*PHC*, XXII, 239), that is impossible to check out, is that in these two figures, Jesus intended to describe the two-fold work

of the Church. In the sheep to be shepherded are seen those disciples just won who need so much help to grow. The waiting harvest, according to this view, signifies those souls whose interest in Jesus was greatly aroused and who could be won, were there but evangelists to reach them in time. The waiting harvest required reapers rather than shepherds, "the men of the sickle, rather than those of the crook." So saying, the two-fold outreach of the Church is pictured rising in the heart of Jesus. This view, while interesting, is impossible to establish, since it cannot be proved that Jesus had such a neat distinction in view between those described as sheep and those meant by the harvest, for He may well have considered them but parallel images of the same idea seen from two angles.

III. THE REQUIREMENT TO REQUEST AND RECRUIT REAPERS (9:37, 38)

9:37 **Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few.** Even though these men have been with Jesus as personal companions for considerable time now, still Jesus does not presume to command them to take up this task upon which the success of His whole mission to earth depends. In His wisdom He involves first their conscience in a moral decision that something must be done about this great need. They must be as motivated as Him. They too must see what He sees, feel what He feels, if they are to share His ministry. To evangelize mechanically, without the spirit and motivation of Jesus, is worse than hypocrisy: it is impossible! In light of the commission He will give the Twelve in the next chapter, note how He first engages their deep concern over these souls, their concern about the paucity of workers in distressing contrast to the magnitude of the task. He then involves them in beseeching God for more workers. Before long, almost before they will have been able to analyze the excellent psychology of His approach, they will actually find themselves spontaneously sharing His vision and His anxiety, and enthusiastically arming themselves to reach out in mercy to help meet the needs of these multitudes.

The harvest, thinks Lenski (*Matthew*, 384) cannot be the multitudes Jesus saw coming to Him, since "some of these people would not be gathered into the heavenly garner." But he sees only half of the harvest work! (Mt. 3:12) The announcement of those

principles upon which the final judgment and separation will be made, is also evangelism. No, **the harvest**, for Jesus, means that the prime moment to begin the work of proclaiming God's kingdom has arrived (cf. Jn. 4:35), and that this work involves telling people in no uncertain terms what God's judgment means. By reaping those who accept the message, the reapers leave to God the disposal of those who judge themselves chaff. But we must not push this figure too far, since human beings are different from chaff, because they must be regarded as a harvest to be reaped, until God calls a halt to this age. (cf. Mt. 13:39-43)

The harvest . . . laborers. Jesus is about to select, challenge and send forth His own personal emissaries. But they must understand their work and share His spirit, as well as express His power and authority. He begins at once to describe the kind of helpers He must have: **laborers**, not princes arrayed in soft robes living in kings' houses, not men with soft hands unaccustomed to the toil of harvest-hands laboring out in the harvest fields.

9:38 Pray ye therefore. Not only must these men share Jesus' vision; they must share also His prayers. Instead of merely lamenting the deplorable condition of Israel as scattered, harassed sheep or as a harvest too great for the number of available workers, Jesus' first response is to engage God-fearing men in **PRAYER**. How often have we encouraged some fainting heart, in anguish under some crushing problem, to pray for God's solution, when, at the same time, we continued wringing our hands about the frustrating enormity of the task of reaching the world without seeing our Lord's wisdom in this text! Jesus was not satisfied simply to load His disciples' minds with the burden of lost souls. He opens up to them also the secret of relief and reinforcements: "Pray for more helpers to face this gigantic task!" How long and how often had the Master Himself been uttering this same cry in His own lonely night vigils? (cf. Lk. 6:12) How fervently had He hoped that these very Twelve would respond positively to His teaching, His shared views, His companionship? These very men were the laborers for the harvest that the Father had given Him and for them He gave thanks and expended every effort to encourage them to be all that an excellent reaper must be. (Jn. 17:6-26; cf. 17:6 with 6:70 and 15:16) He also prayed that the laborers God raised up might not be lost to His service. (cf. Lk. 22:31, 32)

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest. We may well ask our-

selves, if this harvest belongs to the Lord, how would our puny prayers help Him?

1. Lewis and Booth (*PHC*, XXII, 240) answer well:

Why go to prayer first? Because it takes us at once to the right quarters. Who so certain to know about the harvest and all its needs as the Lord of the harvest? Who so likely to be interested in them? Who so able to help? Who so able, especially in this case where the need of help is extreme; where labourers have to be even "thrust forth" (ver. 38) to this work? Who so able to do this as He who sent Saul of Tarsus into His harvest?

2. "It is not only worse than idle to begin anywhere else, but self-sufficient and presumptuous and distrustful also in an equal degree." (*ibid.*)
3. Our praying this way unites our concern and will with God's, making us useful as laborers whenever it please Him to use us. Since the harvest is all around us, in all of our social contacts, we need merely to be transformed into laborers. Can any man honestly pray this prayer without involving himself emotionally in the very activity which has become the burden of his concern? Can anyone pray that God send laborers and not send those whom God makes willing to go?
4. Such praying would keep us and our hindering prejudices out of God's way! While praying like this, can any man at the same time stand around arguing whether the need is great, or whether the souls are lost or not, or whether the people of God should involve themselves in such work, etc?

The Master knew what He was doing when He commanded His men to pray like this! The glorious wonder of this prayer is that Jesus definitely ordered His Apostles to beseech God to provide workers. God obviously cares enough about their prayers to answer them in accomplishing that work which He had already spent thousands of years of patient, careful preparation to do! The great, supreme challenge facing Christianity is that the entire world is to be reached. But the greater surprise of Jesus' message is that God actually needs men to reach that world. He has chosen "truth in the flesh," the living gospel vividly expressed in human personality, to save men. God has deliberately decided that the harvest will not be reaped unless there are human laborers to harvest it. Whether we understand His choice

or not, there is no doubting either the fact that He has so decided or the need to pray for the needed laborers.

IV. RAMIFICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Barclay is right to teach (*Matthew*, I, 366) that

It is the dream of Christ that every man should be a missionary and a reaper. There are those who cannot do other than pray, for life has laid them helpless, and their prayers are indeed the strength of the laborers. But that is not the way for most of us, for those of us who have strength of body and health of mind. Not even the giving of our money is enough. If the harvest of men is ever to be reaped, then every one of us must be a reaper, for there is someone whom each of us could—and must—bring to God.

But what hinders our efforts and strangles our effectiveness? Is it that we do not share Jesus' vision of the task? When we look at the mobs of people crowding their way through life, with little or no passing thought for their comrades on the journey, what do we think? When we are frustrated by the thoughtlessness of selfish individuals, whose unwillingness to help, irks us to the limit, what do we see? Do we see these people as hindrances which we must destroy, since they obstruct our hurried pace? Or do we see them through the eyes of the Lord: lost souls, whose very sins bar our path and frustrate our progress and mar our happiness, yet cry for our help?

Let me look at the scattered crowds

Till my eyes with tears grow dim—

Let me look at the crowds as my Savior did

And love them for love of Him!

—Author unknown

How long should we pray this prayer for reapers? Only so long as there remain sheep without the Shepherd—only so long as there is more harvest than laborers to gather it. Even as those candidates for Apostleship joined their voices in prayer, let us add our voices: "Lord of harvest, send forth reapers! Hear us, Lord, to Thee we cry; Send them now the sheaves to gather, Ere the harvest time pass by."

—J. O. Thompson

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Show the connections between this section and the one which immediately follows in chapter ten.

2. Describe the general situation in Galilee that renders this picture presented by Matthew not only plausible but to be expected.
3. What is the larger role in Matthew's apparent outline that this section plays? Remember that Matthew seems to be following a topical, rather than a strictly chronological, outline.
4. Explain the figure of "sheep without a shepherd." Tell it in literal language.
5. Explain the figure of "the harvest." Tell it in literal language.
6. Describe the motivation that moved Jesus to share His vision with His disciples.
7. How should this vision of Jesus and challenge to His followers be interpreted in the life of the Church today?
8. Whom does Jesus hold responsible for sending workers into the world to labor for God? Whom does Jesus hold responsible for requesting more help? What did Jesus do to answer the prayers of His disciples, i.e. what did Jesus do to make more workers possible? (See Mt. 10)

DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

Matthew 8, 9

Where are these passages found? Who said it? On what occasion? To whom was it said? Why? What does it mean? Are there parallel passages? variant manuscript readings? important other translations of the verse? Are there problems of interpreting it? How shall we apply it to our lives?

1. "See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priests . . ."
2. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."
3. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases."
4. "But the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness: . . ."
5. ". . . leave the dead to bury their own dead."
6. ". . . thy faith hath made thee whole . . ."
7. ". . . for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."
8. "No man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made."
9. "Go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."
10. "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins . . ."

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11. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick."
12. "Have mercy on us, thou son of David."
13. "And Jesus went about . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom . . ."

SPECIAL STUDY: MIRACLES

The fundamental conflict in which Christianity is engaged today, in the intellectual sphere, is between *Naturalism* and *Supernaturalism*. Beneath all the attacks of scientists and philosophers, scholars and theologians upon Christianity lies an undercurrent of naturalism, more or less concealed, according as the opponent of supernaturalism is within the ranks of professing Christians or not.¹

Miracles, as phenomena in historic Christianity, have posed no small problem to every age of the church's existence. Any search into the early years of the Christian religion will reveal the intense, tenacious conviction that the supernatural intervention into human history which we call "miracle" really occurred. The word itself might be defined:

A miracle is an event occurring in the natural world, observed by the senses, produced by divine power, without and adequate human or natural cause, the purpose of which is to reveal the will of God and do good to man.²

The question of miracle revolves around one central historic figure: Jesus Christ. Did Jesus really work miracles? This is a far greater question than just a decision as to whether Jesus worked miracles or not. It is more than simply deciding whether He fed the 5000, healed the blind, cast out demons, and raised people from the dead. It is deciding whether there be a Christ at all. There is no Christ but the Christ of miracle! It is deciding whether there is a God or not. He is morally perverse or intellectually blind who concludes that a religion can be ethically true and historically false. An ethic predicated upon a lie, by the very nature of its case, warns the world against its own truth.

Further, there is no Christ but a supernatural Christ, if any credence be allowed the claims of those writers who furnish the only

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reliable history of His life. There is no supernatural Christ if there is no resurrected Christ. Truly,

"if the resurrection of Jesus was not a reality, all the other miracles would be valueless even if real, and all effort to establish their reality would be abandoned."³

Miracles have a way of smashing our neatly-arranged systems of thought. The miraculous commands our attention and threatens to undo our uniformities not only in nature but in religion. If there is no miracle, no trumpet-call from beyond the natural or the earthly, we can settle down into our comfortable self-pleasure and drink long draughts from the cool glass of self-satisfaction, rousing only to change the record on our philosophic stereo to the soothing, mellow voice suggesting, "Enjoy yourself while you're still in the pink." Suddenly, into our picture of peaceful self-complacency storms a miracle, a fact—stubborn and real—that can not be dismissed. The out-of-the-ordinary has just startled our ordinary and we must react. It is this very feature of the miraculous that leads us to see

THE NATURE OF MIRACLES

Just what occurred back there in that age of "unenlightenment"? Indubitable is the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was reputed to have super-human abilities which He manifested through His short but meteoric rise to the limited public prominence of His country. To appreciate rightly the nature of His supernatural activities we must not view miracles as isolated facts, but in their actual relations to the life of the Man who accomplished them. Any exception is so rare that it is a safe observation that Jesus did not perform the miraculous needlessly. The need for the supernatural acts grew out of the situation and must not be considered independent of that situation. His miracles might be classified thus:

A. POWER OVER NATURE:

At a wedding feast Jesus turned water into wine.

Seeing His disciples distressed in rowing against a stormy lake, Jesus walked across the lake to them, defying gravity. On another occasion Jesus spoke the word and the sea immediately became calm.

One morning at breakfast time He cursed a fig tree and it withered.

By supernatural knowledge He informed Peter that in the mouth of the first fish Peter hauled in would be tribute money.

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B. POWER OVER DISEASE AND DEMONS:

Paralytics, impotent men, women with hemorrhages, sight to blind men, hearing to deaf and speech to dumb, lepers, withered limbs restored to normalcy, wounded ears replaced—all these and many more Jesus did! No weeks or day of anxious waiting, no returns, no incurable cases when Jesus healed a body!

C. POWER OVER DEATH:

Death in others was no problem to this Jesus of Nazareth. He stopped a funeral procession to raise the widow's son; He broke up the funeral to raise Jairus' daughter. He walked nearly 40 miles to raise Lazarus from the grave.

Death in Himself was nothing to fear for He calmly predicted His own death and resurrection with frightening regularity:

Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. (John 10:17, 18)

Many passages could be cited in which Jesus foretold in detail the various features of His passion. Here again we could marvel at the supreme fact—His own resurrection itself.⁴

At this point, our attention has been arrested by the extraordinary nature of Jesus' deeds but for what? Like Moses, the flame of the unusual has attracted our attention and we have turned aside to see why.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

Bible miracles are supernatural phenomena in the realm of human experience WITH A MESSAGE. Why bring up miracles if the one doing them does not have something to say for himself? Such questions are most appropriate. The Jews of Jesus' day could have asked these questions: "Immediately we become interested when we learn that a man can supply a sumptuous meal to 5000 men on ridiculously insignificant rations. We want to know if He will provide battle rations for our national army we are raising. One who is reputed to be able to heal all manner of disease could be very useful to our purposes as we strike out against Rome. Do you suppose He would consent to being our king? What is He saying for Himself? Where is He going? What is He trying to accomplish by these miracles?" So the message is all-important.

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Probably the most significant utterance of Jesus ever recorded was His claim to unique knowledge of God:

All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no one knoweth who the Son is, save the Father; and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22)

Or another claim:

For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that be- holdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:38-40)

My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself. (John 7:16, 17)

I speak the things which I have seen with my Father . . . (John 8:38)

But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God . . . If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me . . . But because I say the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God. (John 8:40-47)

Obviously, throughout His teaching Jesus is claiming to be a very revelation of God. He comes not as a supreme teacher of an exalted ethical system or a propounder of new moral philosophy but as one who comes from God to reveal God's mind to man. In other messages Jesus asserted that He entered the world to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and "to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28) It is clear that Jesus intended to reveal God and ransom man but how do we know He is God's emissary? His "mighty works" hold our attention and most of His doctrine we cannot verify. What is the connection between miracle and message?

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It is perfectly plain that such a revelation would need to be tested and accredited, for unless it were, men would never believe that the revelation was from God Himself . . . man would have a right to demand of anyone claiming to have a revelation from God, that he show his credentials . . . showing that there is no question but that he is the authorized representative of God. Man has a right to demand these credentials, and by the very nature of the case, they must be of a kind that could not possibly be duplicated by man, for if they could be, they would lose all value as accrediting the message from God.⁵

Thus, not only the possibility of miracle is justified but also the probability. How else would God remind people down through the ages saying, "Lo, I am here"? It is the miracle, the departure from the observed uniformity of nature, that arrests the attention of man and makes him realize that a higher person and a higher power is at work. The miracle is the majestic seal that God has affixed to the revelation which He gives us. The Bible is God's Word. An integral part of the Bible record is *miracle*, for the specific purpose of showing it to be God's Word. Except for miracles, how could we know it to be a revelation of God? With no miracle, there is no evidence of deity. Miracles, then, authenticate the Christian message: (1) Jesus Christ appeals to His miracles as His divine authentication.

I told you, and ye believe not: the works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me . . . If I do not the works of my father, believe me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father. (John 10:25, 37, 38)

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:10, 11)

(2) Thus, miracles are an integral part of the record which would become meaningless without the miracle. Remove, if possible, the account of miracle from the book of John and observe how much wasted breath is left in the controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning miracles, which, according to the naturalists, He did not do. Most of Jesus' "Sabbath Controversies" had to do with

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miracles done on the Sabbath. Most of Jesus' most magnificent claims were made in agreement with and in company with some of His most astounding wonder-works. A clear case in point is given in Mark 2 (Matt. 9 and Luke 5) where a paralytic is lowered through the roof into the presence of Jesus and a "congressional investigating committee." Jesus said simply, "My son, your sins are forgiven." The scribes and Pharisees who were in the crowded house immediately considered this statement as blasphemy. Jesus answered their thoughts, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say unto you, Rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he did! We can conclude that (3) The miracles and the words of Christ are wonderful and perfect counterparts. Miracles do not make the claims of Jesus or His doctrines true, but they are the attestation of God that His claims are well-founded and His teaching God's. The power of the miracle taken by itself does not assure me of the truthfulness of the claims set forth, or of the doctrines taught, alone, but of Him through whose instrumentality they are performed. May we conclude then that the primary purpose of the miraculous deeds recorded in scripture is to attest the revelation given as from God? This great salvation which is thus taught

having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will. (Hebrews 2:3, 4)

What was true of the Lord in those days was true in regard to His servants the apostles. The miracles also attested their message as from God. It was the miracles that made the disciples believe in Jesus, and they, in turn, made the world believe in Christ.

A secondary purpose of miracles (and it is clearly secondary) was to demonstrate the mercifulness of God in the case of individual men. The miracles illustrate and explain the teaching of Jesus on the love and mercy of God. It is one thing to hear Jesus talk; it is another thing to see Him in action. In the miracles, we see Christ dealing tenderly and yet majestically with our human lives and their sins and burdens and sorrows and fears. The apostles were no less spectacular in calling attention to God's revelation.⁶

A tertiary object of miraculous deeds was to wreak vengeance

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upon objects unworthy of God's continued grace.⁷ To the mind comes immediately Jesus' cursing the fig tree (Mt. 21:18, 19), the blinding of Elymas (Acts 13:11), the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5, 10). Bible miracles taught not only God's love and goodness but also His power and authority, and sometimes His righteous and fearful judgments.

A fourth purpose of God in the giving supernatural demonstrations of His presence among men is negative in nature: Miracles are not universal in nature. If they ever were or should ever become so, they would lose their value as deeds of a supernatural character for if universal, they would cease calling attention to God's message and become the norm. Bible miracles were never either (1) universal in extent for they have always been limited to few and special cases. Never have they been used to relieve suffering or prolong this life for all of God's people impartially. Some received no miraculous deliverance here, but a better resurrection for the life hereafter (Heb. 11:35-40). John the Immerser, greatest of the prophets, worked no miracles, nor was he miraculously delivered from prison and death (Matt. 11:7-11; John 10:41). Jesus could have healed all the sick or raised all the dead. But He did not and would not. Many were healed by Paul, but Trophimus and Timothy were not (II Tim. 4:20; I Tim. 5:23). A multitude of sick and afflicted lay by the pool at Jerusalem, but Jesus healed only one man (who did not know Him or ask Him to) and then hid Himself from the others. But later He sought the healed man again to teach him and to meet the debate which the Sabbath miracle had aroused with the Pharisees. Nor were the miracles (2) universal in their result: All who were delivered from sickness or affliction had other times to suffer and to die. All who were raised from the dead had to die again. Once and again Peter was delivered from prison and from persecutors but another time he was left to die, when God was no less compassionate and Peter was no less believing. So it was with Paul.⁸

THE REALITY OF MIRACLES

We are standing on the battleground here where naturalism and supernaturalism meet and the war is not over. The question facing this age (and all ages, for that matter) which demands historical certitude, is the decision of the factuality of miracles. Indeed, the establishing of Christianity as a coherent system without historic foundation in supernatural fact can be the employment of some shadow-boxing theologians who make their living striving after wind but this cannot assuage grief, forgive sin, enable men to live in peace with

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each other, or prepare them for eternity. Let not him that girds on his armor boast himself as he that puts it off. The barrage begins: "Intervention of a supernatural character within the universe is impossible because of

A. "THE UNIFORMITY OF THE ORDERLY GOVERNMENT OF NATURE."

Miracles are antecedently possible. There can be no doubt that such a thing as a miracle is a reasonable possibility, whether we ever saw one, or believed that other men had seen one, or not. We cannot be dogmatic about what may have happened, or what can happen beyond our field of observation.

It is objected that a miracle is a violation of law, or God, as He reveals Himself in nature. God, it is said, would contradict Himself if He did anything in another way. But this implies that we know all about God and His ways. Instead of that being so, how small a portion we have seen! The general uniformity of nature to which deniers of the miracles appeal is a blessing to man. It would be a terrible world in which to live if we could not count on the operation of gravity, of heat and cold, of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest. But this uniformity is consistent with voluntary control, and therefore, for good and sufficient reasons, as the Bible tells us it has been, could be "interrupted." When we speak of the uniform type of nature all we mean is that an effect is something produced by a cause, and that all the effects we see are produced by natural causes. But we have no right to conclude that therefore a miracle is impossible, for belief in miracles does not imply that an effect took place with no adequate cause, but that an effect was produced by the immediate act or will of God who ordinarily works through second causes, but sometimes, if the Bible be true, through an immediate act. Instead of being a denial of the law of cause and effect, a miracle is its highest illustration.

A God who made a world and then shut Himself out of it so that He could never enter it again, never arrest, regulate, add to its laws of working, would be no God at all. He would be like a man who made a machine with whose law of operation he could never interfere. What we call "interference, arresting or changing of laws" may not really be such at all, but part of the great plan of God. To man it is a miracle, but not to God.

True enough, nature seems to be working under a system of natural laws, which as far as scientific observation can tell, seem to be invariable in their application. But what are natural laws?

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From scientific point of view, are they anything more than the way the phenomena of nature have been observed to happen within the time range of experience? The natural laws are not the forces themselves which they describe, but only the scientific formulation of the way in which the forces act. Natural laws are not to be confounded with the forces of nature which they describe. They have no control whatever over the forces themselves. Are these forces of nature eternal? They are only the power of God *in action*. If this is the cause, they are governed and controlled by God Himself . . . God is under no compulsory necessity to keep them uniform in their action . . . Now suppose it is part of God's eternal plan that for some great purpose of His own He will intervene in these forces and cause a break in their uniformity and in variability. What is to prevent such an interruption from occurring? Nothing! . . . The only question that may arise is whether God desires the changes to occur. The question that becomes one merely of fact, . . . whether there is any evidence to show that He has intervened. . . . The fact of present uniformity of nature is no barrier whatever to the intervention of God in the past.⁹

David Hume argues that miracles, as such, cannot occur:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the case, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined, and if so, it is an undeniable consequence that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever from testimony.¹⁰

Our question to him would be this: How do we get to know what the general experience of men in respect to the course of nature is? Our own personal experience, indeed, comes from personal observation, but, as we have just seen, our individual experience has little bearing on the case and for our knowledge of experience of men in general we have to depend on human testimony. So the whole force of the argument amounts to this: we must investigate the testimony of those who bear witness to the genuineness of the miracles of Jesus as having been performed before their own observation. The proof of miracles is based on testimony and when coming right down to the question at hand, it simply puts testimony against testimony: the

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testimony of those who were present and observed and affirmed what they saw—these miracles; and that of those who were not present and who declare that in all their experience they never saw such wonders wrought by anyone. David Hume's notorious argument attempts to show that no amount of evidence can establish the truth of a miracle:

When the experience of millions of people can be said to contain nothing miraculous, that is, a raising of the dead, or the sudden stilling of a storm on the lake, then the testimony of one or three people to some such miraculous event must be considered definitely of no historical value, because the testimony of millions of other people has a greater power than the testimony of, say, two or three men, for convincing us of the actuality or nonactuality of some miracle.¹¹

The fallacy of this argument is again exposed by the questions, "Whose experience? Whose testimony?" He starts by stating as fact something he cannot prove—"It is a miracle that a dead man should come to life: because that has never been observed in any age or country."¹² In support of this he would have to prove the gospels historically untrustworthy and he does not attempt to do so. He admits that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish. If the testimony of the gospel writers concerning Jesus' miracles is false—then their falsehood is indeed a greater miracle than the miracles which they describe. But this is mere logomachy.

He also argues that miracles are seen mostly among ignorant and barbarous nations. The people of Jesus' day can hardly be described in so sweeping and so hasty a generalization. It is based on too few samples of the class under investigation!

He argues that if the event harmonizes with what men normally experience, it can be believed if the evidence is sufficient; but if contrary to man's ordinary experience, it cannot be believed. If this is true, can there be such a thing as reporting advances in scientific research and discovery? I wonder if Hume would be so smug as to deny the unique experience of the American astronaut, his view, his reaction, his gathering of real though previously unknown facts.

"Ah yes," says the ghost of Hume, "but millions of people the world around shared vicariously in the experience of the astronaut being informed of his actions every minute by radio and television."

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Tugging the coat-tail of the speculating spectre, we urge, "Mr. Hume, this 'vicarious experience,' as you call it, was shared by the millions because of the reliable, competent, sincere, honest testimony, but since nothing contrary to the general experience of millions of people can be admitted as having historical value on the basis of the testimony of a few, then the testimony of such a small segment of humanity cannot be admitted. Turn back over in your grave and we apologize for the intrusion."

Concluding then, it is said that since natural laws have been determined by God, then He can never exercise His power in any way as to contradict these natural laws. But God is so omnipotent and omniscient that He has the right at any time to do anything He pleases, according to His will, whether it be exactly within the limits of WHAT WE CALL "natural law" or not. In our ignorance of many uncertainties involved in our universe we cannot dogmatize that God cannot work a miracle "contrary to natural law without violating His own character."

B. IGNORANT AUTHORITARIANISM.

One reason why many educated men take a negative attitude toward the Bible miracles is because of pure ignorance of the actual content of the Bible itself, and especially of the evidence in support of its historicity. We should not be surprised at the ignorance when we remember the great lack of Bible study in the early training of university graduates. True enough, the study of all the evidence in support of the historicity of the Bible is a science in itself and requires diligent preparation as such.

But what is both surprising and reprehensible is to find an educated man who is an authority in some other line, setting himself up as an authority on Biblical criticism without having ever given more than the most cursory study to the subject beyond swallowing whole what some destructive critic, whose own opinions are based on naturalistic premises, says about the Bible . . . The saddest part of it all is that such men, because of the respect and reputation which they have rightly gained in their own line of study, received a welcome hearing on the part of hundreds, to which hearing they are in no ways entitled, and lead many astray because their hearers think that they are speaking with equal authority about the Bible as when they speak on subjects in their own line of study.¹³

It may well be that some brilliant minds have read nothing but the distorted religious views of other ignorant religionists whose very

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teaching, not being founded in truth, become the very cause of all religion's overthrow through the brilliant but mistaken writing of the mentally acute specialists in some other field.

Some would say, "Supernatural intervention is very improbable because of

C. "THE PROBABILITY OF FRAUD."

This philosophy makes the claim that Jesus got caught up in playing the part of Messiah and to keep this popularity maintained He hired people to play blind, lame, dumb, insane, or dead so He could appear to people to heal or raise them. They even claim that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was a fixed job! Again we have the impossible dilemma of a supreme ethical teacher violating His own ethic (practicing deliberate fraud) in which case He is nothing but a bold, bare-faced liar; or we impugn the witnesses who testify to the veracity of His miracles which they did not, in fact, ever see.

At this point we have to take a choice! We find it impossible to admire as "divine" a Christ about whom there is only falsified, or at best, deluded testimony. We cannot have our Christ and deny some of the history from which we originally learned about Him! Either we accept the witnesses as reliable and believe their testimony or else deny all of Christ and go write our own religion, for God has not spoken in human history clearly enough for all to hear.

Still others would object to miracles on the basis of

D. THE PREVALENCE OF MYTH IN ANCIENT RECORDS.

This theory would suggest that many, many years after the original witnesses were passed off the scene, mythical accounts began to arise, clothing the "historical Jesus" with a garb of miraculous deeds about which He knew nothing. These myths became part of the later oral traditions which were collected and recorded in the late second and third centuries in essentially the form evolved in our current New Testaments. Thus, according to these theologians, it is our responsibility to extract these mythical elements from the ethics of the "historical Jesus" and in this way be able to accept Jesus without these "hindrances" to rational minds. The attempt to reduce the supernatural acts of Jesus to myth cannot command much attention because (1) If during His life Jesus worked no miracles, the insoluble problem arises how He came to be known as the Messiah by those who looked for a miracle-working Messiah. (2) On what grounds can it be successfully denied that Jesus claimed to work

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miracles? (3) Formation of myths takes time not historically available from Jesus' death to the earliest accounts of His earthly ministry. Recent critical research demands the writing of the original manuscripts of the witnesses well within the first century and not during the late second or early third centuries, as this theory demands.

Other opponents of the supernatural miracles dismiss them as

E. THE DELUSION OF THE WITNESSES.

This is the idea that the apostles thought certain acts of Christ were miracles because they could not account for them by the natural causes which were hidden from them. Proponents of this theory claim that the miracles were made to appear as such by the influence of spiritual power on the nervous system or by medicine or secret remedies. The major fault of this theory lies in the failure to explain the acceptance of Jesus' enemies of the concrete and objective fact of the miracles. True enough, they did not accept the implications of the facts, but there was no denying the facts! Where is the "medicine, magic, or influence of spiritual power" which convinces centurions, high priests, Sadducees and those critical analysts, the Pharisees? These had everything to gain by denying the miracles; the apostles had nothing to gain by affirming them in face of death, privations, maltreatment of all varieties, and social stigmatization. And yet these enemies of Jesus, when they speak, are just as agreed that the miracles of Jesus are fact, as are those witnesses favorable to Him.

Some suggest that miracles of healing were due to some practice of

F. AUTO-SUGGESTION.

The theory would explain healing miracles by the power of Christ's mind acting upon the mind and then the body of the patient through a psycho-therapeutic idea. However,

It is the clear verdict of medical science that suggestion is incapable of removing any medical malady whatever and that its curative effects are restricted to functional disorders. Only what has come into existence through an idea can be removed by an idea.¹⁴

Jesus' healings were instant, not the result of extensive long-process treatment. Can men today instantly make a man walk who has been lame from his mother's womb and open the eyes of one congenitally blind? Can medical science create new arms or legs precisely like the originals instantly for the maimed? This Jesus did. Jesus was unique in this ability.

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G. EXTREME CREDULITY.

has been employed as a charge levelled against the age in which Christ worked, a time when all men looked for and believed in supernatural manifestations. Jesus' age was not any more an age of credulity than the age of our fathers. It was an age of genuine skepticism. True, they were deceived, worshipping gods that were non-existent, but what age has not done that? Study current news events and decide how rational creatures can be so gullible as to swallow the torrent of lies told by world communism. We cannot label any one age as a time of great credulity. The whole of the New Testament itself manifests an age of skepticism. Thomas doubted the resurrection and demanded an empirical basis for his faith. See Matthew 11:21-23 and John 8:46. Is it reasonable to say that the men who wrote the four gospels, that have amazed men down through the ages, were easy dupes whose minds were so childish and under-developed as not to be able to discern between astonishing feats and supernatural miracles? The charge reduced to its simplest form is this: the miracles, having been wrought or supposed to have been wrought in an age fond of believing such events, were received as real without the application of the tests by which their reality could be demonstrated. In other words, it is claimed that they were not worked under scientific conditions.

First, we remark that, whatever may have been the habit of the age in which Jesus and the Apostles lived with respect to miracles in general, and those of these men in particular, there was certainly a large class of persons, including the most acute and intelligent of the Jews, who most persistently refused to credit them; and these men were sufficient in number and in influence to check any disposition on the part of the masses to receive them without question. Second, we have a detailed account of the way in which the miracles were tested by this class of men, and by a comparison of that with which would be applied by scientific men of our own day, we can determine how much credence we should give to the assertion in question.¹⁵

The notable case in point is the healing of the man born blind by Jesus (John 9). The process of investigation, reduced to the simplest statement, was this: they first ascertained that the man could see; they next inquired what Jesus had done to him; and seeing that what He had done was only to put moistened clay on his eyes and require him to wash it off, they next inquired as to the certainty of his

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having been born blind, and they close this inquiry with the testimony of his parents.

Let us now suppose that, instead of the Pharisees who tested this miracle, it had been done by a "commission composed of physiologists, physicians, chemists and persons experienced in historical criticism" as is demanded by M. Renan. What advantage would they have had over the Pharisees in determining whether the man, when first brought before them, could see? It is clear that no knowledge of physiology, or chemistry, or medicine, or historical criticism, could help them in this. The most stupid . . . could settle the question at once by striking with his hand toward the man's face and seeing whether he winked. When it was settled that the man could see and the question was raised, What had Jesus done to give his sight?, the commission would have an advantage over the Pharisees, in that they would know more certainly, on account of their scientific attainments, that merely putting clay on a blind man's eyes and washing it off could not give him sight. Uneducated and superstitious men might imagine that the clay had some mystic power; but scientific man would know better. On this point of inquiry, then, the advantage would be with the commission, but the advantage would be in favor of the miracle. As to the next question, whether the man said to have thus received sight was born blind, what more conclusive testimony could the commission obtain, or what more could they wish, than, first, that of the neighbors who had known the man as a blind beggar; and, secondly, that of his own father and mother? Who, indeed, could be so good witnesses that a child was born blind as the father and mother for they always exhaust every possible means of testing the question before they yield to the sad conviction that their child is blind?¹⁶

Obviously, in testing such a miracle there could be no use made of scientific knowledge; and the same is true of Jesus' miracles in general. The most unscientific men of common sense can know when a man is dead; when he is alive and active; when he has a high fever; is a cripple; is paralyzed, as well as the greatest scientist. The cry, then, that the miracles of the New Testament were not done under "scientific conditions", is totally irrelevant, and can mislead only those who do not pause to think.

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Some moderns who have too much reverence (or too little, depending on your point of view) for the gospels to allow themselves to deny the miracles claim that those events in Jesus' life are not to be used for

H. TEACHING "SPIRITUAL" TRUTHS.

Rather, it is said, these narratives are to be given a "spiritual" interpretation. If these miracles did not take place, what did? The writers gave the impression that it was a distinct and remarkable miracle and they knew that they were giving this impression.¹⁷

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No matter how strong the evidence may be that the supernatural *has* occurred, since these scholars start with the premise that the supernatural can't occur, all evidence for its occurrence is ruled out of court without examination. Now I submit that even from a scientific point of view such a procedure is unwarranted. Questions of fact are not to be decided by any *a priori* principle laid down by any scientists, however erudite they may be! If facts and principles are at odds, so much the worse for the principles! The only thing we must be sure of is our facts. Facts are decided by *evidence*, and by *evidence alone*.¹⁸

The only way we can decide whether or not God has given a revelation of Himself in human history, is by an examination of the evidence tending to show that such revelation has been given. Since the matter is one purely of fact and of fact alone, it can be decided by the evidence. If God *has* given a revelation, no amount of theorizing to the contrary can change the fact.

The force of human testimony depends on three things: first, the honesty of the witnesses; second, their competency; and third, their number.¹⁹

That these qualities obtain in the witnesses of the miracles who record them for posterity is, in my opinion, demonstrated.²⁰ The writers of the gospels that record the miracles of Jesus did not consciously deceive or lie. These men were hard-headed, practical men who, even when Jesus was resurrected, had to be rebuked for their unwillingness to believe that He had, in point of fact, risen from the dead. Neither were the miraculous events that they record the kind that men readily imagine to have taken place. The writers of the gospels that picture Jesus as the miracle-working teacher were with Him

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day in and day out while Jesus walked the dusty trails of Palestine. There was nothing secret about His working of miracles. These men were competent to pronounce judgment upon the miracles. If they knew they were false, why should they declare them to be true fact, not merely supposed fact? What did they have to gain?

All evidence of Christ's miracles is contained in the New Testament. There can be no doubt as to the meaning of the evidence or the nature of the events witnessed to. The men who wrote about these miracles are either deceivers or deceived or else telling the sober truth. If they were conscienceless fabricators, how was it that such men produced that picture of moral excellence before which all the ages have fallen down in the reverent admiration? How could men who lied about the facts of Christ's life have produced so marvelous a character? Of this we can be sure, the men who relate the miracles of Jesus were not conscious deceivers and liars.

JESUS CLAIMED TO WORK MIRACLES

Jesus answered the disciples of John the Baptist:

Go and tell John the things which ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. (Luke 19:22)

Earlier Jesus had said to the Jews:

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not. Ye search the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life: and these are they which bear witness of me. (John 5:36-38)

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:11)

How can we believe in Jesus if we do not accept His own testimony that He worked miracles? People say that Jesus was the greatest of moral teachers of all time and His ethical standard amounts to absolute perfection. Some will even claim for Him that He lived His own supreme ethic which He taught! Yet how can they think

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this and still say He did not work miracles when He claimed to have done so? It gets down to the foundational question: Is Jesus telling us the truth when He claims to work miracles? Did Jesus lie or falsify His credentials? If we say that Jesus was somehow the world's greatest teacher and yet was deluded into thinking He was working superhuman acts (when in fact He did no such thing) we have little more than a self-deceived imposter. There is no middle ground. Do we reject so easily Jesus' moral integrity, or His intellectual soundness?

PROBABILITY FACTORS

By examination of the gospels, the following reasons may be employed to prove to us that the miracles are the subject of adequate and reliable testimony:

A. THERE WERE MANY MIRACLES PERFORMED BEFORE THE PUBLIC EYE.

Jesus healed in the cities, at the busy corners, when surrounded by a mob, when speaking before multitudes in the open or in a house. They were for the most part not done in secret or seclusion or before a select few. Most of them were public property, as it were. There was every occasion and opportunity to investigate the miracle right there. Such clear, open, above-board activity is good evidence of the actual occurrence.

B. SOME MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED IN THE COMPANY OF UNBELIEVERS. Miracles are always popping up in cults that believe in miracles. But when the critics are present the miracle does not seem to want to occur. But the presence of opposition or of critics had no influence on Jesus' power to perform miracles. More than once, right before the very eyes of His severest critics Jesus performed miracles. Now certainly, to be able to do the miraculous when surrounded by critics is a substantial token of their actual occurrence.

C. JESUS PERFORMED HIS MIRACLES OVER A PERIOD OF TIME AND IN GREAT VARIETY.

The imposter always has a limited repertoire and his miracles are sporadic in occurrence. Not so with Jesus. His miracles were performed all the time of His public ministry from the turning of water into wine in Cana to the raising of Lazarus. Further, He was not limited to any special type of miracle. Sometimes He showed supernatural powers of knowledge, such as knowing that Nathanael was

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hid in a fig tree; or He showed power over a great host of physical diseases: blindness, leprosy, paralysis, fever, demons, and death itself; or He was able to quell the elements at a command as He did in stilling the waves and the wind; or He could perform acts of sheer creation as when He fed thousands of people from very meager resources.

Imposture on this scale is impossible. The more times He healed, the more impossible it would be if He were an imposter. Further, it is incredible to think that for three and one-half years He maintained one consistent imposture. The number of miracles, their great variety, and their occurrence during all His public ministry are excellent evidence that Jesus actually performed the miracles the gospel writers record.

D. WE HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF THE CURED.

Many times when Jesus healed, it is recorded that the healed person went broadcasting far and wide that he had been healed, even in those cases where Jesus cautioned the person or persons against it. Certainly the report of His miracles found their way all through the hamlets and villages of Palestine. Consider too, that two of the gospels were written by men who were not eye witnesses, so available was the data of the life of Christ. Thus, part of the reason for the sudden and energetic growth of the church in Acts was the memory of the marvelous life and miracles of Jesus Christ. The result of the personal testimony of the many who were healed, as they spoke to their loved ones, their relatives near and distant, and their townspeople, cannot be ignored in accounting for the great success of the preaching of the gospel in the book of Acts.

E. THE EVIDENCE FROM THE GOSPELS CANNOT BE UNDONE BY APPEALING TO THE PAGAN MIRACLES. Miracles are believed in non-Christian religions because the religion is already believed, but in Biblical religion, miracles are part of the means of establishing the true religion. This distinction is of immense importance. Israel was brought into existence by a series of miracles; the law was given surrounded by supernatural wonders; and many of the prophets were so indicated as God's spokesmen by their power to perform miracles; and the Apostles from time to time were able to work wonders. It was the miracle authenticating the religion at every point.

Pagan miracles lack the dignity of Biblical miracles. They are frequently grotesque and done for very selfish reasons. They are seldom ethical or redemptive and stand in marked contrast to the

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chaste, ethical, and redemptive nature of the miracles of Christ. Nor do they have the genuine attestation that Bible miracles have. Therefore, to examine some pagan miracles and show their great improbability, and then to reject all miracles on that ground is not fair to Biblical miracles or to the science of historical research.

THEREFORE?

Jesus from the commencement to the end of His public ministry wrought many miracles. Christianity claims to be a revelation from God confirmed and vindicated by mighty signs and wonders. The miracles are a strand woven into the fabric of the garment of Christ's personality, and you cannot tear them out without destroying the fabric itself. **THE ONLY CHRIST IS THE CHRIST WHO WALKED ON THE SEA, RAISED THE DISEASED TO HEALTH AND CALLED THE DEAD OUT OF THEIR DEATH CHAMBER!**

Miracles form part of the foundation of our faith, being divine demonstrations witnessing to the origin of the message we have believed. But they are not part of the faith or part of its practice in the lives of obedient believers. The miracles wrought by the messengers of God while the faith was "once for all delivered to the saints" are still effective evidences to establish the truth and authority of that faith.²¹

Finally, whether we believe that miracles happen or not depends on our attitude toward historic testimony to their reality.

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)

1. Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Christian Faith*, (3rd rev. ed.; New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1946); p. 87.

2. Clarence E. McCartney, *Twelve Great Questions About Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), p. 70.

3. J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1891), Part III, p. 116.

4. For a very clear discussion of the direct evidence for the resurrection of Jesus see J. W. McGarvey's, *Evidences of Christianity*, Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1891), Part III, Chpt. X. Also see Wilbur Smith's, *Therefore Stand*, (Natick, Mass.: W. A. Wilde Company, 1959), Chap. VIII.

5. Hamilton, p. 95, 96.

6. They had power to bless; healing sick (Acts 3:6-9); raising the dead (Acts 9:37-42; 20:9, 10); power to grant miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17); power to curse (Acts 13:11).

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7. For Old Testament examples, consider the death of Uzzah (II Sam. 6:6, 7); Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2); the leprosy of Gehazi (II Kings 5:27) and of Miriam (Num. 12:9-14); the blindness of the Syrian band (II Kings 6:18-20); the destruction of army (II Kings 19:35).

8. Seth Wilson, *"The Purpose of Miracles"*, Christian Standard, Nov. 2, 1957.

9. Hamilton, pp. 89, 90.

10. Wilbur Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ*, (Boston: The W. A. Wilde Co., 1958), pp. 142-150, 158.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

13. Hamilton, pp. 90, 91.

14. Smith, *Ibid.*, p. 133.

15. McGarvey; *Ibid.*, p. 112.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114.

17. See John 20:30, 31; 2:11, 23; 3:2; 4:45, 54; 5:1-36.

18. Hamilton, *Ibid.*, p. 92

19. McGarvey, *op cit.*, p. 146.

20. See MacGarvey, *Evidences*, Part III, chapter XII, p. 146ff. Also Wilbur Smith, *Therefore Stand*, chapter VIII, especially p. 422ff.

21. Wilson, *Ibid.*

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER TEN

IS THIS SERMON OF WHOLE CLOTH, OR PATCHWORK?

On first reading this entire chapter it has the appearance of uniform wholeness. It requires only a glance at other Gospels, however, to cause the reader to realize at once that he has encountered some of this same material in quite different places and connections. A bit of first-hand familiarity with Matthew's neat organization of his materials according to topical, rather than strictly chronological, considerations, is almost sufficient to tip the balance in favor of the conclusion that the publican-Apostle is again organizing by collecting materials out of other discourses given on other occasions.

The modern Christian, hurried by immediate, practical concerns, is tempted to ask, almost with impatience: "Why bother to dig into this old question? After all, the chapter has come down to us all in one piece. What is there to gain by puzzling over the problem?" The seriousness of this problem lies in two directions: (1) Matthew's good judgment is placed in doubt, since he seems to ignore propriety by setting down in this place admonitions and predictions that not only were not given so early in the Apostle's training, but would have no connection with their immediate work, necessities or understanding.

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(2) If the material, however, is set forth in its proper place in the self-revelation of Jesus to His disciples, then there is much to gain from this vision of Him as Prophet of the finest order, as General briefing His staff, and as Supreme Lord demanding loyalty due only to God. So, what are the evidences?

A. Arguments offered against the unity of the discourse:

1. Matthew stands alone giving this message in relation to the limited mission of the Apostles in Galilee, whereas the other Synoptic writers include large parts of this discourse in different contexts as messages preached much later on other occasions. (See, for example, Mk. 13:9-13; Lk. 12:4-9, 11, 12, 49-53; 21:12-19) Moreover, in his version of the great sermon on the end of the Jewish nation and of the world, Matthew seems deliberately to omit most of those statements of Jesus he has already included in his report of the Apostolic Commission (Mt. 10), though Mark and Luke both include them in the great eschatological message.
2. In the Lord's farewell address to the apostles during the Last Supper, Jesus specifically remarked, (Jn. 16:1-4)
I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

So it would seem to some that this obvious declaration eliminates categorically any predictions of persecution, prior to the discourses of the Last Week. Consequently, Matthew has placed the material describing persecutions in quite the wrong place.

3. Considering the immaturity and inexperience of the Apostles, it is thought quite unlikely that Jesus would disturb His yet untried warriors by making allusions to perils not likely to menace their simple, limited labors in Galilee.

B. Considerations strongly recommending the unity of the section:

1. The first and most obvious factor that argues the unity of

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this discourse is the fact that Matthew intends to give the clear impression that he is signalling both the beginning and the end of one discourse.

10:5

These twelve Jesus sent out,
charging them, . . .

11:1

And when Jesus had finished
instructing His twelve dis-
ciples, He went on from
there to teach and preach . . .

2. The mere fact, that Matthew omits from his report of the great sermon on the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world (Mt. 24) some materials which he already used earlier (Mt. 10), is no indication that he was ignorant of the fact that Jesus made the declarations reported by Mark and Luke in that great eschatological pronouncement. His deliberateness, rather, is evidence that he DID know about those Last Week statements and chose not to use them again. The inclusion of those remarks by Mark and Luke, on the other hand, does not prove that these sayings were exclusively said by Jesus during the great discussion of Jerusalem's fall and could not have been repeated often earlier. The very sayings themselves are of such nature that they conflict deeply with the then-popular notions about the Messianic Kingdom, held even by the Apostles themselves. So it would not be at all surprising if Jesus had to repeat in similar language on several occasions the very same warnings and the same instructions about how to react.
3. A misplaced emphasis in the reading of John 16:4 can give the impression that Jesus had never before prophesied persecutions, a view which would of course leave Matthew's record under suspicion of forgery or, at least, of improper appropriation of materials, if not outright contradiction. The case stands, however, as Hendriksen, (*John*, II, 322) puts it.

To be sure, there had been predictions of coming persecution (Matt. 5:10-12; 10:16-39). But *these things* (15:18—16:3)—the fact that the world hates the disciples because Jesus has chosen them out of the world; that this hatred was in reality directed against Jesus *and against the*

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Father, that it was absolutely inexcusable and was rooted in the sinister condition of the heart which deliberately refused to acknowledge the true God, that the time was actually coming when men would regard the putting to death of Christ's followers to be tantamount to an act of worship altogether pleasing to God—*these* things, with *that* emphasis and in *that* forthright manner, had never been revealed before. One does not find "these things" in Matt. 5:10-12, which speaks only of persecution in general and of slander in particular—, nor in Matt. 10:16-29, which describes the outward forms of persecution (arrest, flogging, death, name-calling), but says very little about the hidden root from which this persecution springs (only Matt. 10:22, 24, 25, 40; cf. Jn. 15:20, 21). The reason why Jesus had not said these things from the beginning was that it had not been necessary then, because he was still with them. As long as he was physically present, the brunt of the attack was directed against *him*, not against his disciples.

4. It is a false assumption that the allusions to persecutions had no potential connection with realities involved in the Apostles' first, limited evangelistic activity in Galilee. Jesus was about to dispatch His missionaries right in the very bailiwick of that treacherous king whose command would shortly bring about the brutal murder of John the Baptist. The Twelve, commissioned especially to proclaim the identical message of that wilderness voice, must certainly come under the surveillance of that suspicious, testy old king.
5. Objections to Matthew's recording of the latter portion of this sermon (Mt. 10:16-42) disregard the obvious desire of the Lord to charge the minds of His Apostles on the occasion of their commission with a long-range, perspective view of the issues, conflicts and consequences of their ministry. His purpose is not, as is assumed by those who see this chapter as patchwork, merely to prepare His servants to experiment with their abilities in a county-wide campaign in tiny Galilee. No, it is as Bruce (*Training*, 106ff) thinks:

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This Galilean mission, though humble and limited compared with the great undertaking of after years, was really a solemn event. It was the beginning of that vast work for which the twelve had been chosen, which embraced the world in its scope, and aimed at setting up on earth the kingdom of God.

G. C. Morgan (*Matthew*, 102, 103) agrees:

As the King stood in the midst of the twelve, He looked at them and at the immediate present; but He also looked with those clear, far-seeing eyes into the near decades; and still further He looked down all the centuries; and speaking to the first apostles, He delivered a charge which in its comprehensiveness and finality is applicable to the whole movement of His enterprise, until His second advent. He declared the abiding principles, which must obtain through all the ages; and He described the changing conditions which necessitate changing methods.

So it is of real value to His Apostles, that Jesus should lay before them from the first moment of their commission in no uncertain terms the duties, dangers, instructions and encouragements in His description of the complete apostolic mission. From that moment on no disciple could complain, "Why didn't Jesus tell us this was going to happen?" Any repetition of portions of this charge on later occasions is naturally to be expected due to their importance.

6. Objections based upon "allusions to distant dangers" are groundless, since upon closer reflection even these warnings are reassuring and timely, with the result that the disciples, far from being frightened by them, could draw great strength from their memory of Jesus' words. Since they had been warned beforehand, their very suffering when it came would serve to justify and strengthen their faith in Jesus. Further, who can demonstrate it mathematically certain that the Apostles did not in fact encounter much on their first tour that tried their souls? Granted the almost certain probability that whatever they encountered was very light in comparison to later opposition, yet Jesus'

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forwarning them, and their own success in overcoming, was excellent training to endure even greater obstacles later.

C. Conclusions assuming the unity of the passage:

1. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 640f) decides:

It is evident, that the Discourse reported by St. Matthew goes far beyond that Mission of the Twelve, beyond even that of the early Church, indeed sketches the history of the Church's Mission in a hostile world, 'up to the end.'

2. Morgan's thinking (*Matthew*, 102ff) suggests the following comparative outlines of the three fundamental portions of the message, as if Jesus has three clearly distinct periods in view. The division into different periods comes, not out of textual exegesis only, but also from the fulfilment of these words of Jesus in the history of the Church.

THE ENTIRE APOSTOLIC MISSION

a. *First Galilean Tour* (10:5-15)

- (1) From the Apostles' ordination until the beginning of the Church.
- (2) Period of relative popularity, no serious persecution.
- (3) Particular zone of operation only among Jewish people.
- (4) Particular preparation: light equipment, dependence on Jewish hospitality.
- (5) Particular message: coming messianic kingdom.
- (6) Particular credential: miracles as identification with Jesus.

b. *The Apostolic Church* (10:16-23)

- (1) From the beginning of the Church until the end of the Jewish state and Jerusalem.
- (2) Period of Jewish persecution from Pentecost till fall of Jerusalem.
- (3) Wider sphere of influence even among Gentiles.
- (4) More thorough preparation and equipment, not based on hospitality. (Lk. 22:35, 36)
- (5) Open proclamation of accomplished facts; special help of the Spirit.
- (6) General credential: immediate inspiration as identification.

c. *The Whole Church* (10:24-42)

- (1) From the fall of Jerusalem to the end of the world.
- (2) Period of general difficulty, rejection, death.
- (3) General work: Confession of Jesus by ALL slaves and disciples of Jesus.
- (4) Emphasis on moral preparation, less on mechanical.
- (5) Widest possible proclamation of Jesus' message.

- (6) Moral credential: suffering as identification.

But after making such a neat outline of this chapter, which upon first, even on the second, reading of the discourse, is perhaps not so obvious as the neat rows of the outline would suggest, we might well ask ourselves if this outline is so important and necessary to

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the communication Jesus intended. For example, why did not Jesus come right out and identify the precise time periods to which each portion of instruction belongs? This would eliminate our having to guess at the applications. But this very observation may be the key: He did not wish His Apostles to concern themselves with a misplaced emphasis on apocalyptic times and seasons or to apply general principles only to particular periods and not to the whole of their ministry. As Edersheim (*Life*, I, 640f) has it:

At the same time it is equally evident, that the predictions, warnings and promises applicable to a later period in the Church's history, hold equally true in principle in reference to the first Mission of the Twelve; and conversely, that what specially applied to it, also holds true in principle of the whole subsequent history of the Church in its relation to a hostile world. Thus, what was specially spoken at this time to the Twelve, has ever since, and rightly, been applied to the Church; while that in it, which specially refers to the Church of the future, would in principle apply also to the Twelve.

If the outline suggested above has value, it is because we, who have appeared on the scene in our historic time period, have the distinct advantage of historical perspective, which the Apostles themselves, as men, standing there before Jesus, prior to the fulfilment, did not have. Even with the haunting spectre of reading into Jesus' words ideas that are not there, we believe we can make out in this sermon the prophetic foresight of the Master as He describes with unerring precision the pattern, problems and progress of the entire Apostolic mission. If it be objected that with the death of the Apostles themselves their mission ceased, then let it be said that if the Church exists today, it does so in direct proportion to its recognition and acceptance of the Apostles' mission. No, the Apostles' mission is not, and will not be, completed until Jesus comes again to call a halt to the Apostles' work. No, the Apostles are not through working, for they "though dead, yet speak" through that permanent teaching medium they prepared for areas and eras where they personally could not labor: the Scriptures. Any Church today may judge itself truly apostolic by its fidelity to that message which the Apostles taught and recorded for all ages.

Returning to the question of this study, we conclude that this sermon of Jesus is all of a piece, a fitting charge given to the

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Apostles on the occasion of their entering upon the very work to which they had been earlier called, in the same way that the Sermon on the Mount was a fitting message of ordination for the occasion of their calling to the Apostleship. (Cf. Lk. 6:12-49)

One final word is in order about Matthew's orderly argument which this entire chapter exemplifies. Note how this section beautifully carries forward his presentation of the ministry of Jesus the Messiah:

1. Jesus the Messiah as proclaimer of the Kingdom of God (chap. 5, 6, 7). In that message typical of Jesus' preaching, the Master describes the Kingdom of God. He is elaborating His edicts.
2. Jesus the Messiah supernaturally accredited by miracle-working power (chap. 8, 9). In this section presenting a collection of miracles typical of Jesus' power, the Master proves His right to say the things He is. He is exhibiting His evidence.
3. Jesus the Messiah expanding His effort, multiplying His ministry and enlarging His effectiveness. (chap. 10)

SPECIAL STUDY

THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLES

Many self-appointed theologians still echo the ancient lie of Satan asking, "Yea, hath God said thus and so?" hardly comprehending that to pose such a question is to question and quibble the eternal authority of the Author of their salvation. It is one thing to seek the clear evidences which would point to the revelation of God in human history, and quite another to seek, by feigned wisdom, to evade its message. Jesus clearly declares in this section that God will be revealing Himself through Jesus' twelve appointed and empowered ambassadors. It is sufficient to investigate with a true and honest heart whether God has truly spoken in human history. But, having discerned this, it is sufficient to obey.

The question of this study is not, then, why or how or should God speak through human messengers, but did He, in fact do so? Since we have the accurate message of Jesus recorded by honest, competent, reliable witnesses, we may assume that God's Son is competent to empower His rather ordinary disciples, thereby enabling them to speak extra-ordinarily the very word of the Almighty. Study these four major points of proof that the Apostles' ministry at this time was but the extension of Jesus' own:

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- I. God would verify their message as God's own by supernatural demonstrations of His presence and approval (Matthew 10:7, 8; compare Hebrews 2:3, 4; Mark 6:12, 13; Luke 9:6).
- II. Jesus declared that those who would reject His Apostles' message would surely receive heavier condemnation than the wickedest of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:14, 15).
- III. Jesus promised that God's Spirit would speak directly in those human messengers in the hour of trial (Matthew 10:19, 20)
- IV. Jesus concludes His charge by asserting that to receive and hearken to the words of the Apostles is precisely equivalent to receiving Jesus Himself and the God who sent Him. (Matthew 10:40)

It was perfectly legitimate for every devout son of Abraham to require the credentials of those who claimed to speak for God. But, having received them, he must obey.

How often do we refuse God's proffered mercies merely because we reject the instrument through which He would make them available to us? Some would rather be accursed from God than receive God's bounties at the hands of Judas, who later betrayed Jesus! But in this ministry Judas assisted Jesus. Judas worked miracles probably along with the other Apostles. At this time all Twelve Apostles are but the multiplication of Jesus' personal ministry, even though these men were largely ignorant of Jesus' deeper meaning behind His messages, largely unaware of the necessity of the cross and deeply in need of further training. But they were nonetheless messengers of Jesus, hence, sent by the living God! Woe to that individual or city that rejects them! How blessed is that village or people that heard the voice of God in the Galilean accent of these simple men sent out by Jesus!

It should not be at all surprising, therefore, to see develop in the continuing revelation of Jesus, the Apostolic office, endowed with all the authority of the Holy Spirit. But now they are in training. Let us hear Jesus as He prepares them for this first task on their own.

WHY TWELVE APOSTLES?

It is obvious, from the emphasis Matthew gives to it, that this commission given to the Twelve represents an important advance in the progress of Jesus' self-revelation, but what is its exact meaning? Mechanically, the number twelve represents a group of men small enough to be able to teach effectively and large enough to get the

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work done. But in reference to the mission they were to accomplish, what moved Jesus to set apart these twelve as APOSTLES?

I. Jesus desired to multiply the effectiveness of His own ministry.

A. A. B. Bruce (*Training*, 96) thinks that "this mission of the disciples as evangelists or miniature apostles was partly without doubt, an educational experiment for their own benefit; but its direct design was to meet the spiritual necessities of the people, whose neglected condition lay heavy on Christ's heart."

B. Reed (*PHC*, 248) observes astutely: "The man who seeks to do the largest amount of good will recognize that far higher results may be attained by instructing a few persons of influence 'who shall be able to teach others also,' than by working always upon an inert mass, destitute of life and reproductive energy."

C. As this chapter shows, Jesus conferred upon His Apostles:

1. His own mission: "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Cf. 15:24)
2. His own message: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Cf. Mt. 4:17)
3. His own miracles: cf. 10:1, 8 with 9:35.
4. His own miseries: "A disciple is not above his Teacher." (10:24, 25)
5. His own mastery: "He who receives you, receives me." (10:40)

D. The result of this commission was that it turned the Twelve into just that many more Jesus Christs to reach out into those areas of needy humanity where Jesus Himself could not go.

II. Jesus planned that the Apostles become personal eye-witnesses of all that transpired while they were with Him.

A. While their very title signifies that they were to be *men sent forth* on special missions for the Master, yet they were specifically called to "be with Jesus," to be His companions (Mk. 3:14; cf. Lk. 8:1 later)

B. In fact, as McGarvey (*Fourfold*, 221) judges: (contrary to the opinion of Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 92f and Lambert, *ISBE*, 202f):

A necessary condition of their apostleship was this seeing of Jesus and the consequent ability to testify as to his actions, especially as to his resurrection (Ac.

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1:8, 21, 22; I Cor. 9:1; Ac. 22:14, 15). They could therefore have no successors.

- C. Reed (PHC, 247) asks: "But granted the need for witnesses, were the men upon whom the solemn choice fell, competent for the discharge of so grave a function?" He then answers:
1. "The miracles of Jesus were of a kind which the humblest observer could judge, and perhaps judge even better than his superiors in rank.
 2. . . . even if the Twelve were in any measure disqualified in inferior station from bearing trustworthy evidence, they were thereby just as much incapacitated for the concoction of a clever forgery," and, of course, their writings must be explained in some reasonable manner.
 3. Barnes (*Matthew-Mark*, 107) adds that they were not especially learned men, who could spread Christianity by their erudition;
 4. They were not wealthy men who could bribe others to join their movement by offers of wealth or worldly advancement;
 5. They were not men of positions of authority who could compel others to believe.
 6. They were just good men who make the best witnesses in a court of law: plain men of good sense, fair character, of great honesty with a favorable opportunity to ascertain the facts to which they bear witness. They were the kind of men everybody believes and especially when they are willing to lay down their lives to prove their sincerity.
- D. R. C. Foster's splendid description (*Standard Lesson Commentary* 1957, 44) deserves wider hearing:

The roster of the leaders whom Jesus had assembled to assist Him in His campaign and to receive intensified training from Him is given just before this commission is recorded. The list starts the reader into meditation upon the known and the unknown in their lives. But little is known beyond the name of most of these men. Yet how many significant accounts of their heroic faith and consistent victories might have been written! . . .

We are immediately impressed by the fact that these were what the intelligentsia of that day called "ignorant and unlearned men." Good and honest

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hearts constituted the first prerequisite. The simplicity, humility, teachableness, and burning devotion of these men made them choice material for the Son of God to fashion into noble leaders of the church. Some who read the historical accounts of the New Testament are prone to magnify the mistakes of these apostles and to sneer at their slow comprehension. Such hypercriticism needs to be reminded how much more rapidly the apostles apprehended the truth about Jesus than did the college trained scholars, the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. The apostles heard and saw much more of the revelation Jesus presented than did these scholars, but the latter saw and heard enough to prove their unwillingness or their inability to learn and accept the truth which threatened their wicked way of life and their false leadership over the people.

The apostles lacked the formal training which the scribes possessed, but they were free from all the excess baggage of false ideas and ideals which overloaded the scholars. When Saul of Tarsus met Jesus and gave his life to Christ, he became the great apostle, for he had the natural ability, the intellectual discipline which men could give, plus God's divine revelation to him and a flaming faith and courage which enabled him to turn the world upside down. But Paul had a desperate time recovering from the false conceptions which the scribes had given him. It took a face-to-face meeting with the risen Christ before he was able to rise above the handicap of a false education.

The apostles came from different walks of life with the advantage of varied backgrounds giving peculiar points of contact with different people they met and peculiar power to their testimony as it was reflected against their own personal background. Being experienced in hardships, privation, and burdensome toil, they were qualified to become veterans in such strenuous campaigns as Jesus carried on. They could make long, forced marches; they could listen or proclaim; they could lend the helping hand in public ministry or in necessary arrangements for the physical

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necessities of their journeys; they could lie down on the hard cold ground at night for rest if no home opened a welcome to the divine One who had no place to lay his head. In less than four years they reached the heights: they could 'walk with crowds and keep their virtue, or talk with kings, nor lost the common touch.' They could stand unafraid in the midst of the high tribunals of state and under threat of death proclaim, with the utter simplicity of the truth, their testimony to the facts of the gospel and the divine revelation which Christ had committed to them. What a moving example they have set before us!

- III. Jesus intended for the Twelve to learn evangelism, share in His own service and then continue His work in the world after His ascension.
- A. On this staff of co-workers depended the immediate effect, as well as the long-range future success, of His mission to earth.
 - B. This is why He *chose* them from among the disciples, the "learners," from among men whose minds were open. (Cf. Lk. 6:13) Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 370) quips: "The shut mind cannot serve Jesus Christ."
 - C. He *called* them, but they could accept or refuse that summons: they were present because they chose to be with Him. (Cf. Mk. 3:14) Their acceptance of His calling to be with Him was extremely important, for, before they had anything worthwhile to say to men, they must learn to live in His presence, imbibe of His Spirit, think His thoughts after Him.
 - D. He *appointed* them (Mk. 3:14). This officially set them apart as "The Twelve," as Apostles. Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 370) thinks that "it was not a case of drifting unconsciously into the service of Jesus Christ; it was a case of definitely being appointed to it."
 - E. He *sent them forth* (Lk. 9:2): their lives were not meant to be spent in contemplation and study, even though, until they had done this, they had little to say. They must begin their service.
 - F. He commanded them to herald His message, not their own views or traditions, as Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 371) writes: "The Christian is not meant to bring to men his own opinions or

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his views; he brings a message of divine certainties from Jesus Christ."

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

(Parallels: Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6)

PREVIEWING IN OUTLINE FORM

- I. Jesus Calls the Twelve and Empowers Them For Special Service (Mt. 10:1-4; Mk. 6:7; Lk. 9:1)
- II. Jesus Instructs and Charges the Twelve How to Proceed (Mt. 10:5-15; Mk. 6:8-11; Lk. 9:2-5)
 - A. Their Words and Works (Mt. 10:5-8; Lk. 9:2)
 - B. Their Equipment and Conduct (Mt. 10:9-15; Mk. 6:8-11; Lk. 9:3-5)
- III. Jesus Challenges and Warns the Twelve of the Dangers and Difficulties That Lie Ahead (Mt. 10:16-31)
 - A. General Warning (Mt. 10:16)
 - B. Persecution by the State "Church" (Mt. 10:17)
 - C. Persecution by the State Government (Mt. 10:18)
 - D. Promise of Power in the Hour of Peril (Mt. 10:19, 20)
 - E. Persecution by Their Own Families (Mt. 10:21, 22)
 - F. Prudence in Persecution (Mt. 10:23)
 - G. Suffering of the Savior and His Servants (Mt. 10:24, 25)
 - H. Freedom From Fear (Mt. 10:26-31)
 1. The Triumph of Truth (Mt. 10:26, 27)
 2. The Right Reverence (Mt. 10:28)
 3. The Care of the Creator (Mt. 10:29-31)
- IV. Jesus Requires and Rewards Loyalty of His Servants (Mt. 10:32-39)
 - A. The Supreme Honor For Loyalty (Mt. 10:32)
 - B. The Supreme Disgrace For Disloyalty or Cowardice (Mt. 10:33)
 - C. The Inevitable Enmities in Loyalty to Jesus (Mt. 10:34-36)
 - D. The Secret of Success Through Sacrifice and Surrender (Mt. 10:37-39)

10:1-4

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- V. Jesus Rewards Those Who Welcome His Servants (Mt. 10:40-42)
 - A. The Authority of His Messengers (Mt. 10:40)
 - B. The Reward of Those Who Help His Messengers (Mt. 10:41, 42)
- VI. The Twelve Apostles Depart to Evangelize (Mk. 6:12, 13; Lk. 9:6)
- VII. Jesus Also Goes to Evangelize Galilee (Mt. 11:1)

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE
APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

I. JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE AND
EMPOWERS THEM FOR SPECIAL SERVICE

(Parallels: Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1)

TEXT: 10:1-4

1. And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.
2. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother;
3. Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;
4. Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Have you any idea why Jesus chose exactly twelve to be apostles, no more and no less?
- b. Why would Jesus, God's Son, need to spend the night in prayer prior to the selection of His Apostles? What do you think He prayed about?
- c. Do you think Jesus knew before He chose them what each of the Apostles would become? If so, why did Jesus choose Judas? If you had been Jesus and could read Judas' future clearer than most people understand their own past, would you have gone ahead and chosen Judas, fully aware that your best attempts to win him over

to true discipleship would be in vain? Or do you think Jesus knew all this at the beginning?

- d. What is your opinion: was Judas evil when Jesus called him to be an Apostle? Or did he go bad during his associations with Jesus? If you conclude the latter to be the case, how do you explain this phenomenon of a man who in the best of environment with the finest of human association still being lost as a sinner in the end?
- e. If Matthias (Acts 1:15-26) were also a companion of Jesus at this time, what explanation can you give for Jesus' not having chosen HIM instead of Judas? Or even in place of some other?
- f. Why does Matthew begin the list of the Apostles' names by saying, "First, Peter . . ." ? In light of the seemingly incurable tendency in the human race to worship heroes and in the light of all Church history, we ask why should Matthew adopt so tendentious a beginning? Could the Holy Spirit, who inspired Matthew, not have foreseen the future developments in Church history and thus been able to forestall that adoration of Peter as the chief of the apostles? What do you think?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus called to Him His twelve disciples, and began to send them out two by two.

(Here follows a flashback to their actual call to Apostleship:

During that earlier period, Jesus, seeing the crowds, went up into the hills to a particular mountain to pray. All night long He continued in prayer to God. In the morning He called to Him His disciples, those whom He desired, and they came to Him. From this group Jesus selected twelve, appointing them to be with Him and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. These He named to be Apostles:

1. Simon Peter (Bar-Jonah)
2. Andrew (Bar-Jonah), Peter's brother
3. James (Bar-Zebedee), John's brother
4. John (Bar-Zebedee). These last two Jesus surnamed "Boanerges", an Aramaic word meaning "Sons of Thunder".
5. Philip
6. Nathanael (Bar-Tholomew or Bar Tolmai)
7. Thomas Didymus ("the Twin")
8. Matthew Levi, the tax collector (Bar-Alphaeus)
9. James (Bar-Alphaeus)

10. Judas Thaddaeus, of James
11. Simon the Cananean, who was called "the Zealot."
12. Judas Iscariot (Bar-Simon), who became a traitor and betrayed Him.

Then Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of His disciples. There He preached the Sermon on the Mount as an ordination message.)

Jesus gave them power and authority over all demons and unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and heal every infirmity.

SUMMARY

In relation to the great popularity of Jesus' ministry, He feels the great urgency to multiply the effectiveness of His own work, as well as the pressing necessity to train His Apostles in practical ways to carry out His ministry. So He collected together the Twelve Apostles, who had been ordained earlier, and commissioned them with this specific, limited ministry.

NOTES

10:1 **And He called unto Him His twelve disciples.** In order better to understand this call it would be helpful to see the various "calls" of Jesus, to which the Apostles had responded.

1. Their first invitation to become disciples (cf. Jn. 1:35—2:2)
2. His call to become intimate companions in travel with Him with more specific purpose to learn evangelism (cf. Mt. 4:18-22; 9:9). It is presumed that the original call to become collaborators of Jesus, directed to each man, individually, occurred early in the first year. (Cf. Ac. 1:21, 22)
3. Their election to Apostleship (Mk. 3:13-19; Lk. 6:12-17).
4. Now, this first specific mission as Apostles. (Matthew 10).

When one follows the more strictly chronological narratives of Mark or Luke, he sees a vigorous popular ministry in Galilee following the original call to learn evangelism. During that period there also occurs a series of hot controversies as well as wide-spread fame for Jesus and growing interest among the people, including the ordination of the Apostles. Thus this call (Mt. 10:1) arises out of this context and is intended to give them the commission which follows and the instructions for carrying it out. These men had thus advanced in their growth of faith and understanding of Jesus' mission, from being

simple disciples to intimate understudies, then, here, to being Apostles at work under Jesus' personal direction. Later, they will function entirely on their own, when He would have returned to the Father; but now they are given limited work balanced with their present capacity.

Reasoning in reverse from a fixed point of time relatively certain, we can determine the general time in which this commission was given and executed.

1. The Passover was at hand when Jesus fed the 5000. (Jn. 6:4) This passover may well have been the beginning of the third year of Jesus' ministry.
2. Jesus fed the 5000, although He really intended to escape the notice of Herod (Mt. 14:1, 13; Mk. 6:14; Lk. 9:7-9).
3. Herod's attention was turned to Jesus, because of the vigorous, multiple ministry of the Apostles on the very mission recorded in this chapter. (Cf. Mk. 6:12, 13; Lk. 9:6-9)

The actual time, then, of this commission is toward the close of the second year of Jesus' ministry.

What is the connection between the great challenge laid before the Apostles (Mt. 9:35-38) and the commission contained in this chapter? That there is a connection is clear, since the psychological connection is perfect: Jesus lays on the hearts of His men the great, pressing need for laborers, urging them to make it the burden of their prayers. He makes sure that they see the great vision of lost souls that moved Him, in order that they might sense their lostness and be moved by the same compassion that drove Him. At the same time, however, it is obvious that the Lord is not calling around Him (Mt. 10:1) the very men to whom He had just spoken (9:35-38), unless we are witnessing a narrowing process by which Jesus individuates the Twelve out of a larger group of disciples who had been so challenged. It may well be that this is the first step in preparing larger groups, like the Seventy (Lk. 10). This is beautiful strategy! He sends out a small, well-trained, trustworthy group to succeed on a first mission with limited objectives. Later, Jesus can enlarge the group, using the Twelve as the basic nucleus of experienced evangelists, who are able to train others also. This is workable strategy, even though He has higher goals and a loftier position for the Twelve themselves. (Cf. Mt. 19:27, 28) As a psychological master-stroke, this narrowing process is priceless, since the larger band of disciples who are not immediately chosen, both see the choice of the Twelve, hear the terms of their commission and then are permitted to

study the problems of the Apostles' ministry. Then, seeing that common men like themselves can be trusted to carry out Jesus' missions, more disciples are thereby encouraged to tackle the task of evangelism. It would seem, therefore, that, psychologically speaking, the mission of the Seventy naturally follows the mission of the Twelve, just as Luke (9:1-10; 10:1-20) arranges it.

He gave them authority: here is a tacit declaration of deity! This Nazarene can share the very authority and power of God without any apparent relationship to the Holy Spirit or of any prayers to God that He grant this to them. How Jesus did this is not part of the text, but the unquestionable fact is that He did. It is not known whether this sharing of authority was given by the laying on of Jesus' hands accompanied by the prayers and fasting of the Apostles, or by His simple declaration that they were now the stewards of that power which the Apostles had earlier recognized as God's power in Jesus. Certainly, this solemn, impressive giving of power was neither lightly given nor received.

Authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. This quick summary of the work of the Apostles serves only to introduce the chapter, not limit what they were to do, inasmuch as their specific instructions actually included more than these two types of miracles. (See on 10:7, 8)

Notice the difference between **authority** (*exousian*) and power (*dynamis*: Lk. 9:1). The former word gives the right to the Apostles to command that demons obey them, while the latter provides the miraculous supernatural force to enforce the order. These Jesus' men are pitted against Satan's finest, and consequently, against Satan himself, for they will be attacking his house, binding him and seize those his victims. (See on 12:29) Plummer (*Luke*, 239) remarks that "the Jewish exorcists had neither *dynamis* nor *exousia*, and made elaborate and painful efforts, which commonly failed." This very possession and use of power and authority would be the obvious signal to all Galilee that these Apostles are not magicians or common exorcists, but men from God! That they actually exercised this power is demonstrated in Mk. 6:12, 13; Lk. 9:6 (See under VI). Not only so, but Jesus later empowered the Seventy to do the same (Lk. 10:17). But by making this statement, Matthew intimates that the Apostles had not worked any miracles before this moment. Until this moment, they were but assistants to Jesus; henceforth they labor alongside Him, working miracles as does He; however, always in dependence upon

Him as the giver of the power and because of their trust. (See on 17:19, 20)

10:2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. Why this apparent emphasis on "twelve"? This is now the second time in two verses that Matthew brings this number to light. Is he trying to say something special to his Jewish audience? McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 220) is probably on the track of the answer to this unquestionably symbolic choice of exactly twelve—not eleven nor thirteen—Apostles:

We cannot think that the number twelve was adopted carelessly. It unquestionably had reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, over whom the apostles were to be tribal judges or viceroys (Lk. 22:30), and we find the tribes and apostles associated together in the structure of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12-14). Moreover, Paul seems to regard the twelve as ministers to the twelve tribes or to the circumcision, rather than as ministers to the Gentiles or the world in general (Gal. 2:7-9). See also Jas. 1:1; I Pet. 1:1. This tribal reference was doubtless preserved to indicate that the church would be God's new Israel.

Anyone who has studied the scanty notices of the individual Apostles in the Gospel records must soon despair of knowing very much about each man. And it is no little temptation to start writing Apocryphal Gospels that fill in the missing information that surrounded the lives of these men. Even the best attempts of men not saturated with Ebionite or Gnostic views are not much better at satisfying human curiosity to know these heroic giants of the faith, than were the distorted views pictured in the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses. Character studies are simply unfair when based on so slight information, since they become hasty generalizations founded on too few samplings taken from the lives of the men themselves.

But this scarcity of information on the Apostles has great value apologetically, since our records are not the Gospel of Peter, Paul and Mary, but the Gospel of Jesus. Much as we would like to pry into the personality of major figures in the New Testament, these very people themselves indicate the role they play: they are "onstage" only as secondary characters against which the majesty of Jesus Christ is seen in greater relief. Hence, the New Testament authors were not writing to satisfy our intense curiosity to know the details of the lives of anyone else but Jesus. Though this curiosity is perfectly

normal psychologically—as is evidenced by the flurry of Apocryphal books that deal in this very merchandise—yet the inspired authors stuck to the bare essentials. The Apocryphals cater to our curiosity and show what human inspiration can produce; the genuine, canonical Gospels speak to our need to know Jesus, and show what divine inspiration produces. So we must resign ourselves with Edersheim (*Life*, I, 521): “The difficulties connected with tracing the family descent or possible relationship between the Apostles are so great,” as well as almost all other details associated with the lives of these men, “that we must forego all hope of arriving at any certain conclusion.”

LISTS OF THE APOSTLES

Mt. 10:2-4	Mk. 3:13-19	Lk. 6:12-16	Ac. 1:13
<i>Simon Peter</i>	<i>Simon Peter</i>	<i>Simon Peter</i>	<i>Peter</i>
Andrew his brother	James of Zebedee	Andrew his brother	John
James of Zebedee	John his brother	James	James
John his brother	Andrew	John	Andrew
<i>Philip</i>	<i>Philip</i>	<i>Philip</i>	<i>Philip</i>
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew, publican	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
<i>James of Alphaeus</i>	<i>James of Alphaeus</i>	<i>James of Alphaeus</i>	<i>James of Alphaeus</i>
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon, Zealot
Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Cananaean	Judas of James	Judas of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

For further information on each apostle, consult encyclopedic articles on related subjects. The following notes were thought helpful.

The first, Simon, who is called Peter. The word **first** is not intended to signify primacy, but rather its usual numerical sense; as if Matthew were saying, “Here is where the list begins,” without numbering all of the men. It cannot mean that Peter was the first disciple, since even his own brother, Andrew, preceded him in discipleship (Jn. 1:40-42), and brought Simon to Jesus. There is no doubting that Peter was a preeminent Apostle, judging from the much greater knowledge we have of him than any other Apostle possibly except John or Paul. (See Jn. 1:40-44; Mt. 8:14ff.; Lk. 5:1-11; Mt. 10:2; 14:28; Jn. 6:68; Mt. 16:13-23; Mk. 5:37; Mt. 17:1-5; 24-27; Jn. 13:1-10; Lk. 22:31-34; Mt. 26:31-46; Jn. 18:10-12; Mt. 26:56-58; Mk. 14:66-72; Lk. 22:54-62; Jn. 18:15-27; 20:1-10; Mk. 16:7; Lk. 24:34; I Cor. 15:5; Ac. 1:15-26; 2—5; 8; 9—11; 12; 15; Gal. 2:11-

14; I Co. 9:5; Jn. 21:18, 19; 2 Pet. 1:12-15.) Peter's preaching is not only summarized in Luke's Acts, but brought down to our age in the letters Peter wrote. But that this preeminence is no primacy, as will be shown in the outline study: "The Primacy of Peter."

Andrew his brother, i.e. Peter's, hence many of the passages on Peter's early relationship to Jesus apply equally well for Andrew. Later mentions of Andrew: Jn. 6:8, 9; 12:20-22.

James the son of Zebedee. Although his brother John is more prominent in the Gospel narratives, as well as in the Acts, James is mentioned first here, since, it is thought, he was the older. John is described as James' brother, but not vice versa and always appears in the apostolic lists after James, except in the list of Acts. This latter fact may be a foreshadowing of the more eminent position in the Church occupied by John. James' tragic murder was the first martyrdom among the Apostolic company. (Ac. 12:2) See notes on the call of the four fishermen, Mt. 4:18-22.

John his brother. Were James and John cousins of Jesus? It may be that Zebedee's wife and the mother of Jesus are sisters, a possibility which would make these men cousins and explain their special intimacy with the Lord in several important occasions. (See Charts 1 and 5, on the special study, "The Brethren of the Lord," under Matthew 13:54-58). Besides his call and position as one of the inner circle of Jesus' closest associates (Mk. 5:37; Lk. 8:51; Mt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36; Mt. 26:36-46), John "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), the following texts on James and John reveal that vigor and vehemence, that zeal touching on ambition that probably earned them the title "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17); Lk. 9:51-55; Mk. 9:38 and Lk. 9:49; Mt. 20:20-28; Mk. 10:35-45. John's ministry not only involved his early preaching, seen in the Acts, but abides to our time by way of the Gospel that bears his name, three letters and the great Revelation (1:1, 4, 9).

10:3 **Philip** of Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), an early disciple of John the Baptist, brought Nathanael to the Lord (Jn. 1:45). Though the evidence is slight upon which the following description is based, it might be instructive to include it. (*ISBE*, 2368)

(Philip) himself possessed an inquirer's spirit and could therefore sympathize with Greek's doubts and difficulties . . . the slower Philip, versed in the Scriptures (cf. Jn. 1:45), appealed more to the critical Nathanael and the cultured Greeks (cf. Jn. 12:20-22). Cautious and deliberate himself and desirous of submitting all truth to the test of sensuous

experience (cf. Jn. 14:8) he concluded the same criterion would be acceptable to Nathanael also (Jn. 1:46). It was the presence of this materialistic trend of mind in Philip that induced Jesus, in order to awaken in His disciple a larger and more spiritual faith, to put the question in Jn. 6:6, seeking "to prove him." . . . It was not merely modesty, but a certain lack of self-reliance, that made him turn to Andrew for advice when the Greeks wished to see Jesus.

Bartholomew is possibly the surname (Bar Tolmai="son of Tolmai") for *Nathanael* of Cana in Galilee. The arguments backing this identification of two names with one man are:

1. Nathanael is never mentioned by the Synoptic Gospels, while Bartholomew is never mentioned by John, who implies that Nathanael was one of the Twelve (Jn. 21:2).
2. In the Synoptics, Philip is closely connected with Bartholomew (see lists of the Apostles), and in John with Nathanael (cf. Jn. 1:45ff.). It was Philip who brought him to Christ.
3. Most of the other Apostles have two names; why not Nathanael Bar-Tolmai?

Thomas Didymus ("the Twin" of whom? See Jn. 11:16) Interestingly, the Clementine Homilies, 2:1, supply the name "Eliezar" as Thomas' twin brother. Where was this unknown twin—had he chosen not to follow Jesus? Had that twin too been separated from Thomas by the dedication to the Master of his twin-Apostle? Coincidentally, he is always linked with Matthew, in the Synoptic lists: was he associated in work with Matthew? Consider the imaginative description of Kerr (*ISBE*, 2973), worked out of these texts: Jn. 11:16; 14:5; 20:24-29; 21:2:

Although little is recorded of Thomas in the Gospels, he is yet one of the most fascinating of the apostles. He is typical of that nature—a nature by no means rare—which contains within it certain conflicting elements difficult of reconciliation. Possessed of little natural buoyancy of spirit, and inclined to look upon life with the eyes of gloom or despondency, Thomas was yet a man of indomitable courage and entire unselfishness. Thus with a perplexed faith in the teaching of Jesus was mingled a sincere love for Jesus the teacher. In the incident of Christ's departure for Bethany, his devotion to his Master proved stronger than his fear of death. Thus far, in a situation demanding immediate action, the faith of

Thomas triumphed; but when it came into conflict with his standards of belief it was put to a harder test. For Thomas desired to test all truth by the evidence of his senses, and in this, coupled with a mind tenacious both of its beliefs and disbeliefs, lay the real source of his religious difficulties. It was his sincerity which made him to stand aloof from the rest of the disciples till he had attained to personal conviction regarding the resurrection; but his sincerity also drew from the testimony to that conviction, "My Lord and my God," the greatest and fullest in all Christianity.

Matthew the publican unobtrusively inserts his own name in this hall of fame, containing names of the greatest men our world will ever know. Fully conscious of the significance of the list, Matthew never ceased to marvel in the wonder at God's grace who could make use of a PUBLICAN! Notice that although Matthew tells very little about any other Apostle—perhaps a distinguishing appellation here or a blood relationship there—he does not mention the occupation of any other Apostle. The only Apostles about which he tells anything negative are Matthew the publican and Judas Iscariot! Other than his other name, Levi, son of Alphaeus (Cf. Mt. 9:9 with Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27) little else is known of the man, except his authorship of this Gospel. It is not likely that Alphaeus, his father, should be the same as the father of James of Alphaeus, for this man would have been his brother, a fact that he would hardly have overlooked in light of the other pairs of brothers mentioned.

James the son of Alphaeus. See Chart 5 on "the Brethren of the Lord" under 13:54-58 to visualize the following points relative to this James, Simon and Thaddaeus, all of which are problematic and inconclusive:

1. This James of Alphaeus is thought to be identifiable with James the Little (Mk. 15:40).
2. If we see four women at the cross and identify Mary, the mother of James the Little and Joses (Mk. 15:40) with Mary of Clopas (Jn. 19:25);
3. And if the name "Clopas" is *linguistically* and *personally* to be identified with Alphaeus (on which question good scholars stand both for and against);
4. And if Clopas be admitted to be Joseph's brother, according to the testimony of Hegesippus cited by Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.* iii, 11);

5. Then James of Alphaeus (Clopas) is also a cousin of the Lord.

Thaddaeus is the same as **Judas of James**, as a comparison of the lists of the Apostles shows, Matthew and Mark always using the former name; Luke consistently adopting the latter. So it is "Judas Thaddaeus of James," but how are we to understand the genitive "of James"—brother or son? It would seem strange to use the genitive for brotherhood when it is so often intended to indicate the parent, unless there is some clear, overriding reason in a special case to interpret it otherwise. Perhaps in putting the emphasis on "James" in the name "Judas of James," we have looked back to the last-mentioned man of that name, when it might have been Luke's purpose only to distinguish this Judas from the next Judas (Iscariot) in much the same way as does John who actually says "Judas, not Iscariot" (Jn. 14:22). If this James happened to be just another unknown man by that name, then, of course, the supposed kinship to Jesus of Thaddaeus Judas of James vanishes.

10:4 **Simon the Cananaean** is just hellenized Hebrew for **Simon the Zealot**. Edersheim provides the true Hebrew for what comes out in Greek as "Cananaean:" *Qannaim* (*Life*, I, 237; on the Zealots, see encyclopedic articles and Edersheim, *Life*, 237-242; cf. Notes on 9:27, 30). Is this Simon the same man as the Symeon, mentioned by Hegesippus (*Eccl. Hist.*, iii, 11; iv, 22), who was the son of Clopas, Joseph's brother? If so, Simon would be the brother of James of Alphaeus, granted the possible identifications given in his case. While these two men, James of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, are not called brothers, as are the first two pairs, yet it is strange that Luke (6:15, 16 and Ac. 1:13) should consistently bracket the name of Simon by the names "James of Alphaeus" and "Judas of James". He does this without either identifying the "James" intended in the second case or explaining whether the simple possessive form (*Iakóbow*) means "son" or "brother", unless that relationship was so clear as to require no further explanation. It may be that the explanation is to be found right in the text: James, Judas Thaddaeus and Simon are three brothers, sons of the same father Alphaeus-Clopas. But these connections, if that they may be called, are too tenuous to provide anything more than interesting speculation.

Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. What an epitaph! It is his only claim to fame. Most folks think he was a Judean from the Judean town named Kerioth (Josh. 15:25), or perhaps of Moab, since there too was such a city (Jer. 48:24; Am. 2:2), because his

family name, Iscariot, seems to be derived from "Ish-Kerioth," "a man of Kerioth." However, this is not conclusive since a Galilean could carry such a name without being from Kerioth himself. In Italian, for example a man can be named Giovanni di Bologna ("John of Bologna") but be born and live in Rome, or Katherine Genovese ("the inhabitant of Genova, Italy") who lived her whole life in New York. So Judas' Judean name does not make him any less a Galilean than Peter, unless, of course, other information should prove him so. Simon Iscariot, Judas' father (Jn. 13:26), may have been an immigrant from Judah (or even son of immigrants himself) in which case such a distinction would make sense in the new area in which he was the newcomer, easily distinguished from the other Simons of Galilee by the nickname "Simon, the man from Kerioth." Passages from which a picture of Judas can be gleaned are: Jn. 6:66-71; 12:5, 6; cf. also Mt. 26:7-13; Mk. 14:3-8; Mt. 26:14, 15; Mk. 14:10, 11; cf. Lk. 22:3-6; Jn. 13:10-18, 21-30; Mt. 26:21; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:21; Mt. 26:16, 47-50; Mk. 14:43, 44; Lk. 22:47; Jn. 18:2-5; Mt. 27:3-10; Ac. 1:16-20.

These two contrasts, chosen from among many fine character studies of the Apostles, deserve wider readership, even though there is some obvious, if excusable, fiction writing here:

Simon the Zealot . . . in whom hot passion masqueraded as holy zeal. The impure fire had been clarified, and turned into holy enthusiasm, by union with Christ, who alone has power to correct and elevate earthly passion into calm and permanent consecration and ardour. What a contrast he presents to the last name (Judas Iscariot)! A strangely assorted couple, these two; the zealot, and the cold-blooded, selfish betrayer, whose stagnant soul has never been moved by any breath of zeal for anything!

(Alexander Maclaren, *PHC*, 246)

One, Simon the Cananean, was a former guerrilla fighter, sworn to kill on sight any Jew who had dealings with the despised Romans. One Jew whom Simon would have killed on sight was our author, Matthew! Matthew quietly inserts his own name in the roster of the Twelve which includes the name of Simon the Cananean, his one-time, would-have-been assassin! Matthew reminds his readers that the disciples had nothing in common with each other except their common loyalty to Jesus Christ. A renegade, Matthew, and a patriot, Simon, who had taken a blood oath to kill any such renegade

—men with the most diverse backgrounds were brought together by Jesus Christ.

(William P. Barker, *As Matthew Saw the Master*, 35)

That Jesus could unite such men to labor side-by-side, gives tremendous witness to Jesus' power to convert men! If the Master can make such eternally good use of such common men, what extraordinary encouragement to put ourselves at His disposal!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. When and where did Jesus first acquire disciples?
2. When and where did He first call men to leave home and follow Him constantly, to become His companions in travel and labor?
3. When and where did He first name the twelve disciples to be apostles?
4. When and where did He first send forth to preach with power and authority?
5. When and where did He question them about their faith in His identity?
6. When and where did He promise them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth?
7. Name the twelve Apostles, and tell what you know about each one.
8. Distinguish between the words "disciple" and "apostle," showing the stages of relationship to Jesus and His work through which the Twelve passed from one to the other.
9. Although Jesus chose Judas to become an Apostle, what did He already know about the man? (See John 6:70, 71; 17:12)
10. Describe the sermon that was preached by Jesus at the time of the choosing of the Twelve to become Apostles and show its particular fitness for that occasion.
11. Describe the sermon that was preached by Jesus at the time of the official commissioning of the Apostles, and show its particular fitness and importance for that occasion.

SPECIAL STUDY

THE SUPREMACY OF PETER

The fact that the Apostle Peter is personally mentioned first in every list of the Apostles, and in Matthew's list is marked for special preeminence by the expression: "The first, Simon, who is called

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Peter," has certainly been misinterpreted by many as expressing the ecclesiastical supremacy of the Lord's fisherman-Apostle.

For the following basic outline, which brings together important evidences to the contrary, we are indebted to McGarvey (*Four-fold Gospel*, 221f), to which is added a note here and there:

1. Peter's natural talents gave a personal, but not an ecclesiastical, preeminence over his fellows. This explains not only the Lord's natural preference for this boisterous ex-fisherman over the other less expressive, though nonetheless sensitive, Apostles.
2. That Peter had supremacy or authority over his brethren is
 - a. nowhere stated by Christ, (Mt. 16:18, 19 notwithstanding, see Notes)
 - b. nor claimed by Peter himself; (see below under 4)
 - c. nor stated by the rest of the Twelve.

The total blackout in the New Testament on this subject, so important to the development of the Biblical doctrines of the Church, is incomprehensible in light of the papal claims made for him. For, if this primate position were essential to the nature of the Church, the Apostles could hardly be thought to have omitted reference to it, even if only in passing. But this total silence is most significant: it cannot mean that the other Apostles had no opportunity to mention it, since many Pauline discussions, for example, describe the fundamental unity and nature of the Church without ever once touching the (reputed) primacy of Peter as unitary head of the Church on earth.

3. The clear declarations of Christ place the Apostles upon the same level with each other. (Cf. Mt. 23:8-11; 18:18; 19:27, 28; 20:20-27; Jn. 20:21-23; Ac. 1:8; Lk. 22:24-27) As will be seen in the study of Mt. 18, in its entirety, had Jesus wanted to clarify the burning question of hierarchy in favor of any one of the Apostles, the opportunity offered Him in that context could not have been better. In that case, had He needed to clarify the proper spirit in which to serve Him, while explaining the structure of ecclesiastical hierarchy, which was the practical import of the disciples' question (Mt. 18:1; cf. Mk. 9:33, 34; Lk. 9:46-48), He missed His chance. Evidence that the supposed primacy of Peter was not settled in his favor by the declarations in Mt. 16:18, 19 is to be found in the fact that long after Jesus' promises and predictions about Peter, the disciples dispute

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about which of them was to be regarded as the greatest (Lk. 22:24ff.). In both of these situations, just a word from Jesus explaining that, despite His demands for humility of spirit and a willingness to serve others, yet Peter was to take command of the Church, would have sufficed for all ages to establish Peter's ecclesiastical primacy.

4. Peter's own declaration, rather than assert his supposed primacy, claims no more than a position equal to that of other officers in the Church under Christ (I Pet. 5:1, 4). That any of his supposed successors do not follow in the footsteps of Peter is revealed in the chasm that separates his doctrine from theirs. Peter himself shows that the Church was not established upon him as *petra* (cf. I Pet. 2:4-9, especially in Greek).
5. Paul's attitude toward Peter is incredible in light of the latter's supposed supremacy:
 - a. Paul withstood Peter to his face, a fact that is unbelievable in light of the theory of practically total infallibility (Gal. 2:11-14). Practical total infallibility, not merely when the Roman pontiff speaks "ex cathedra", is fundamental to modern Catholic belief:

The bishops when they teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff, must be heard by all with veneration, as witnesses of the divine and catholic truth; and the faithful must accept the judgment of their Bishop given in the name of Christ in matters of faith and morals, and adhere to it with religious respect. But this religious respect of will and intelligence is in a special manner due to be given to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking "ex cathedra," with the result that his supreme teaching authority be accepted with reverence, and that the pronouncements given by him be adhered to with sincerity, according to the mind and will manifested by him, which is made clear especially either by the nature of the documents or by the frequent riproposing of the same doctrine, or by the tenor of the verbal expression.

(Documents of the Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium*, on the "Dogmatic Constitution of the

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Church", paragraph 25, my translation from the Italian text.)

- b. If lists in themselves are important, Paul lists Peter as second in importance to James the Lord's brother (Gal. 2:9). Although this is no complete list of the leading figures in the Jerusalem Church, it shows Paul did not consider the order of names in his sentence of great importance, as might be supposed to be the case in a tightly organized hierarchy of which the Roman system is the best example.
- c. Paul did not despise Peter, but sought him out especially (Gal. 1:18, 19), but this is stated in a context where Paul vigorously denies any dependence upon other Apostles for the authority of his own apostolic mission. (Gal. 1:11, 12, 16b, 17; cf. 2:6-9)
6. The attitude of James at the Jerusalem council is incredible, since after the speech of the "infallible" Peter, James requires, "Brethren, hearken unto me . . . my judgment is . . ." These words of James would be rendered utterly superfluous after the declarations of Peter, were he really supreme. Further, it is the decision of the assembled Apostles and elders to follow the advice of James. (Cf. Ac. 15:7-11 with 13-21).

McGarvey concludes that, were it possible even to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that Peter were actually primate in the ecclesiastical sense among the Apostles, the papacy would still be left without a valid claim to its pretended honors, since it would still have to prove that it was heir to the rights and honors of Peter, which is something it has never yet done. The papal claim rests not upon facts, but upon several assumptions:

1. That Peter had supreme authority among the Apostles and evident infallibility;
2. That he was the first bishop of Rome (important, because all successive bishops of Rome are thought to be his lineal successors.)
3. That the peculiar powers and privileges of Peter (if he had any) passed at the time of his death from his own person, to which they belonged, to the chair of office which he thus vacated.
4. That ANY Apostle had a successor.
5. That the bishop of Rome is Peter's direct and personal successor.

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6. That any successor of the bishop of Rome possesses the infallibility invested in him as the supreme teaching authority of the Church.

It might be getting too far afield from our principle theme, the supremacy of Peter, but in connection with the misuse of any evidence of Peter's preeminence, it would be well to remember that the so-called lineal successors of the Apostles do not at all qualify for the office to which they lay claim, inasmuch as the following qualifications identify an apostle:

1. They must have seen the risen Lord. (Ac. 1:21, 22; I Cor. 9:1)
2. They must have been called to Apostleship by the Lord to fulfil that mission assigned to them particularly by the Lord who sent them. (Jn. 20:21) In the absence of positive proof that the Apostles left behind specific directions for their own succession, we are obligated to believe that they left none, hence did not pass on their unique mission.
3. They must perform the signs of an Apostle:
 - a. In miraculous gifts (2 Co. 12:12) that authenticate their message and their doctrines as from God;
 - b. In the conversion of souls to the Lord (I Co. 9:2), not in drawing away disciples after them (Ac. 20:30)
 - c. In the establishment of churches in all the world (Gal. 2:8)
 - d. In divine revelations (I Co. 11:2; 15:1, 2, 3; I Th. 2:13; 2 Th. 2:15; 3:6; Ro. 6:17; Gal. 1:9-12; Phil. 4:9; Col. 2:6-8) not in the imposition of human traditions that contradict God's revelation.
4. They must serve as the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20), i.e. their word given under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit must serve as direction and support for the Church throughout all ages of its existence (Jude 3; 2 Pe. 1:3, 4; Rev. 22:18, 19; I Jn. 4:6; Heb. 2:1-4; 13:7, etc.)

For a discussion of Peter's peculiar responsibility to use the "keys of the kingdom," see notes on Matthew 16:18, 19.

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

II. JESUS INSTRUCTS AND CHARGES THE TWELVE HOW THEY ARE TO PROCEED

(Parallels: Mark 6:8-11; Luke 9:2-5)

TEXT: 10:5-15

A. THEIR WORDS AND WORKS

(Matthew 10:5-8; Luke 9:2)

5. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them, saying, Go not into *any* way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans:
6. but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.
8. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons: freely ye received, freely give.

B. THEIR EQUIPMENT AND CONDUCT

(Matthew 10:9-15; Mark 6:8-11; Luke 9:3-5)

9. Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses;
10. no wallet for *your* journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the laborer is worthy of his food.
11. And into whatsoever city or village ye shall enter, search out who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go forth.
12. And as ye enter into the house, salute it.
13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.
14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as ye go forth out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.
15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you see are the differences between the first commission of the twelve and the so-called "Great Commission"? (Mt. 28:19, 20)
- b. Was all of Matthew 10 applicable to the first commission? Or was Matthew summarizing in this one place material from other commissions that properly applied to their own setting?

- c. Is any of Matthew 10 intended for today? If so, what portion(s)? If not, why not?
- d. Why do you suppose Matthew connects the names of the Apostles (vv. 2-4) with the commission which follows, using the phrase "These twelve Jesus sent forth . . ."? Who were these twelve men socially, religiously, politically? What did they amount to? Who had ever heard of them?
- e. If it be true that a "prophet is not without honor except in his own country, in his own house and among his own kin," why then did Jesus deliberately send these practically unknown Galilean Apostles to labor in their own country and among their own people? What could possibly be gained by this tactic? Could not Jesus foresee that the Galileans would possibly refuse and reject His Apostles as Nazareth rejected Him because they thought they knew too much to accept them?
- f. Why would Jesus, the Savior of all mankind, send His Apostles only to evangelize Israel? Did Jesus not care for the Samaritans or Gentiles? But Jesus deliberately limited the Apostles' ministry to Jews. How can you justify this apparently blatant nationalism in Jesus' practice?
- g. Why does Jesus call His own people "lost sheep"? What was there about the Jewish people that caused them to fit this apt description?
- h. Why did Jesus empower His Apostles to work miracles? How could that help Him to further His own ministry? Would there not be confusion created by six pairs of men going out doing the same works as Jesus? Which man would the multitudes know to follow if so many worked miracles and preached?
- i. What great, purely Christian doctrine is wrapped up in the simple instruction: "Freely you received, freely give"?
- j. If the Apostles were going to be travelling all over Galilee evangelizing why were they not going to need to take a lot of equipment and clothing along for their journey?
- k. In what way(s) would it be more tolerable for great sinful cities of the past, than for a city that refused the Apostles and their message?
- l. What is so important about staying at the home of one respected family during the Apostles' stay in a town?
- m. What is so important about not charging for the miracles the Apostles worked or for the messages they preached? What is the psychological principle behind this advice? In other words,

why is this always good judgment, and properly applicable to Christian workers today?

- n. Is it wrong for a preacher to receive wages? How do you know? Did not Jesus say: "Freely you have received, so freely give"?
- o. How do you harmonize these two apparently contradictory statements: "Freely give" and "The laborer is worthy of his food"? Is not Jesus expecting His disciples to work without expecting wages, while yet expecting to be supported by the very people to whom they minister? Support or wages, what is the difference?
- p. Did Jesus ever revoke His command to the Apostles to pursue their evangelistic labors lightly equipped? Would it be wrong for a missionary or evangelist today to purchase the most useful modern equipment he could effectively put to use to make the Gospel heard?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

These twelve Apostles Jesus sent out to evangelize Galilee, with these instructions: "Do not go off to Gentile country and stay out of Samaritan towns. Concentrate on the lost sheep of Israel. Preach as you travel, announcing the arrival of God's Kingdom. Heal the sick people, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast the demons out. What you have received without paying for it, give without charging for it.

"Do not take a lot of unnecessary extra equipment on your journey. For example, you will not need a lot of silver and gold, no, not even copper coins, in your purse. You are not to take even one suitcase and no lunch. Take only the sandals on your feet and the tunic on your back. Do not even take a change of clothes, nor two pair of sandals nor an extra staff,—one staff is enough. Why? The working man earns his upkeep—you work hard preaching for me and folks will take care of you!

"Now, regardless of what town or village you come to, look for someone who is respected there. Make your home with him until you go on to the next town. When you stop at his house, wish the household peace. If the household deserves it, then the peace in your salutation shall come upon it. But if that house does not deserve your 'shalom', then your blessing of peace will return to you and leave when you do.

"Now should anyone or any town not receive you or listen to your words, here is what you are to do: if they refuse to hear you, then when you leave that house or town, give them a visible demon-

stration of your fulfilled responsibility for trying to save them, by shaking the dust of their house or streets off your feet. I can tell you this: it will go easier on judgment day for the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town!"

SUMMARY

The aforementioned Twelve were sent by Jesus to preach only to Jews in Galilee the message of the arrival of God's Kingdom. They were to give the miraculous evidence of their authority, without charging for it. They were to travel light, depending upon good people to help them. If they were rejected they were to keep going. To reject them is to incur God's punishment.

NOTES

I. A PARTICULAR ZONE FOR A PARTICULAR PERIOD

(10:5, 6)

10:5 **These twelve Jesus sent forth.** **These twelve**, taken as a phrase following immediately upon the heels of a precise list of the names of the men as well as after two specific references to the number twelve, becomes especially emphatic or is nothing but a clumsy redundancy. Why does our author express himself this way?

1. Matthew may be marveling at the comparative insignificance of these men Jesus chose, in contrast to the overwhelming importance of the task to which Jesus called them. **These twelve?** Who are they? Had the power clique of Judea (Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate and company) glanced at the list of the makers of a new empire that would bring all other kingdoms, rule and authority to their knees before the Nazarene, they would have sneered, "Who are these? Not a one of them in Who's Who! How can this Jesus expect to amount to anything, when He's placing all His hopes on rabble like that? Imagine: not a rabbi among the whole lot!" With quiet inner joy that can come only from knowing the power and victory possible in the Master's service, Matthew responds, "Yes, just imagine Jesus' using **THESE** twelve—of all people! But it was this group that Jesus chose—no others. He knew what He was about. He made the decision to use these nobodies to change the world."
2. Or it may be that Matthew, in connection with the context which his ninth chapter provides, intends to remind us here

that these are the very men with whom Jesus had shared His vision, whom He had involved in a prayer campaign for workers. Morgan (*Matthew*, 102) has it:

"Pray ye," is the first command; "go ye" is the next. The men who have learned to look with the eyes of Jesus until they feel with the heart of Jesus and who, out of such vision and such feeling, begin to pray, are more than half ready for the work of bringing in the harvest.

These twelve Jesus sent forth "two by two," says Mark. This strategy has proven itself time and again by its sound psychology:

1. Maclaren (*PHC*, 246) challenges us to "learn the good of companionship in Christian service, which solaces and checks excessive individuality and makes men brave. One and one is more than two, for each man is more than himself by the companionship."
2. The Jewish mentality toward the witness borne by anyone had trained people to expect the testimony of two men to be more weighty than that of one, even though the one were speaking the truth. (Cf. Jesus' way of arguing in Jn. 8:16-18). So two Apostles, working together, could give more powerful convincing witness to the deeds and message of the **Christ**.
3. McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 363) adds, "Different men reach different minds, and where one fails another may succeed."

And charged them, saying (*paraggeilas*). This is a formal order, and especially imperative in light of the peculiar nature of the order given: Jesus had to be particularly clear in laying out the work for His men, since some of the things He would have to say contradicted the men's own view of themselves and of the work they must perform.

Go not into any way of the Gentiles and enter not into any city of the Samaritans. Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 372) points out the evidential value of this sentence: "This saying is so unlike the mind of Jesus that no one could have invented it. He must have said it, and there must be some explanation." Its provocative character becomes immediately apparent when we think of Jesus as the universal Christ, for if there is a portion of the race for whom Jesus is not Lord, then He is not worthy of our ultimate consideration. For all of His great accomplishments, if His message is not for every man,

then we may yet suspect that His Word is not final and we have yet someone else higher up with whom we shall have to do. Surprisingly, Jesus deliberately limits His men to Israelitish country.

But this is not latent nationalism or inadvertent parochialism in the program of Jesus. It is just common sense under the circumstances. How so?

1. **The Gentiles** had not been given 2500 years of thorough preparation under the Law and prophets as had the Jews. Therefore, they would not have been quite as ready to appreciate this final revelation God was giving through Jesus the Messiah, as would the Jews.
2. Were **the Samaritans** any better prepared? They retained their denominational form of Judaism, badly mixed with pagan ideas. (See encyclopedic articles on the Samaritans; also Butler's comment on John 4:7-9 in the College Press series, p. 141.)

When one considers the strong Jewish prejudice against all that was non-Jewish, this expedient of limiting the Apostles' ministry to the Jews at this time is just common sense, even though the Lord will later, under different circumstances, broaden even this commission. The time is not yet come when the Apostles' own thinking is broad enough to comprehend a universal Gospel for the entire human race. And if the Apostles themselves had this difficulty, how much more scandalized would Jesus' more distant followers be, were they to witness the shocking (to them) spectacle of a wholesale opening of the Kingdom of God "to just anybody—even Gentiles and Samaritans!" (Study Ac. 11:1-3) Jesus must yet disarm their prejudices as much as possible, while He makes this final appeal to the Galileans by means of this limited mission of the Twelve. So the prohibition itself arises out of Jesus' general masterplan for establishing His Kingdom on earth. He aims ultimately to conquer the world, but to do this, He intends to secure a strong base of operations first. This He does among those most likely to be ready. Later He can countermand this order, turning the Apostles loose on the whole world. (Mt. 28:19; Ac. 1:8; 8:25)

This latter fact becomes a clue that helps determine how long this particular, limited commission was to last and how much of it was intended for that period. Morgan (*Matthew*, 103) reminds us that "with His crucifixion, the order initiated ended, and save in fundamental principles, the commission of those verses has no application to us."

10:6 **But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.** This command, stated just this way, links the Apostles' mission inseparably with the very motives that moved their Lord, and probably became their own driving force, to share God's mercy with His lost people. (See on 9:36) Jesus deliberately uses that figure out of His own vision of lost Israel to call the attention of His men to the most fundamental character of the work they were to do. He could have said more simply: "Evangelize only the Jews." But He is not merely indicating the proper field in which to begin. He is setting before their minds an unforgettable metaphor that provides them at the same time both direction and motivation. Should anyone object to this severe limitation of the Apostles' outreach, let it be remembered that this limitation bounded Jesus too. (See on Mt. 15:24) Lenski's observation (*Matthew*, 391) has point here:

What Jesus had done on one occasion in Samaria (Jn. 4:3-42) and on certain occasions for individual gentiles (as in 8:5, etc.) and what he had hitherto said about salvation for all men (5:13, 14; 8:11) was prophetic, was not intended for the present but for the great days of the future.

To appreciate this severe limitation of the scope of the Apostles' work, we must recognize in what context Jesus sets these limits; otherwise, we will but find what seems to be a charge contradictory to the otherwise unsullied universality we have come to associate with Jesus. Why limit the Apostles' ministry to Israel?

1. *The time element* is extremely important to notice. This commission comes long before the salvation for the whole world had been made a reality through the cross, burial and resurrection of the Lord. It will be noticed later (see on 10:7) that the message of the Apostles was not the final form of the universal Gospel intended for the whole world, when the fundamental facts of this Gospel had been enacted upon the stage of history in Jerusalem. This commission, coming as it does almost in the middle of Jesus' own earthly work (see on 10:1), certainly not later, is to be judged in light of the progressive revelation of the Kingdom that He is making. It is imperative that we remember that it is Matthew himself who informs us both of this limited commission here and of the universal commission later (28:19). It may be safely presumed that he could differentiate between them, seeing no contradiction between them.

2. *The sociological element*: Israel was most prepared of any one group to receive the good news these men had to tell. Here in this nation would be the most ready, most immediate reception. This is, of course, relative, since many Gentile hearts, hungering for truth, security and liberation, would have been just as receptive as those among the Jews, as later experiences of the Apostles seem to indicate. (See, for example, Ac. 10; 11:19-26; 13:4-12, 16-50; 17:4, 11, 12, etc.) But there seems to be a "divine order" that stands behind and governs Jesus' approach to the world: these perishing Jews were especially precious to God for the sake of the fathers (Ro. 11:28), and though they have no prior claim to anything, God has a prior claim upon them! (Cf. Ro. 1:16; 2:9, 10; 3:1-3; 9:4-5) So they ought to be sought first. Also, as suggested above, due to the apparent Jewish feeling of their prior rights to all that God offers, Jesus might stand to lose all hope of convincing those among the Jews who could otherwise have been won, were He to begin at this point a general Gentile ministry in conjunction with His evangelization among the Jews. Sociologically, He must not "rock the boat" just yet.
3. *The maturity of the Apostles* is an important matter. Their own preparation was still limited to the point that labor among their own people upon familiar ground was essential to permit their succeeding at all. Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 373) is right in saying: "A message has little chance of success if the messenger is ill-equipped to deliver it." This does not mean that their power or authority was lacking, since Jesus was providing this directly Himself. It means, rather, that their personal character needed time and experience to mature. This is considerate forethought on the part of the Lord: He gives them tasks they can handle, but tasks which will qualify them for larger ones later. Listen to Bruce's description (*Training*, 98):

Their hearts were too narrow, their prejudices too strong: there was too much of the Jew, too little of the Christian, in their character. For the catholic work of the apostleship they needed a new divine illumination and a copious baptism with the benignant spirit of love. Suppose these raw evangelists had gone into a Samaritan village, what would have

happened? In all probability they would have been drawn into disputes on the religious difference between Samaritans and Jews, in which, of course, they would have lost their temper; so that, instead of seeking the salvation of the people among whom they had come, they would rather be in a mood to call down fire from heaven to consume them, as they actually proposed to do at a subsequent period. (Lk. 9:54)

This point cannot be overemphasized, since human beings are incurably worshippers of heroes, children never tiring of playing "follow the leader." The Apostles were to provide new heroes, new leadership to their own people, now tired of leaders who had not the slightest notion where they were going, who instead of giving real spiritual refreshment, wandered around seeking answers to their own dark doubts. But the new leadership of the Apostles must reflect as nearly as possible the mind of Christ. They must sound no uncertain notes, give no false impressions. Because of prejudice and ignorance and moral failure in their hearers, rejection may be judged inevitable in many cases, but insofar as the Apostles themselves were concerned, the rejection must not arise out of some inadequate or false conception of their own. The message of God for any age carries with it its own stumbling block and its own foolishness (Cf. I Co. 1:18-25), and there are difficulties enough without some weakness in the bearer of the message, which give greater occasion to reject it.

4. *The limited amount of time Jesus may have wanted to expend upon this educational experiment with the Apostles is another factor. The Apostles must have practice working by themselves without Jesus' being present if they are to learn to work well alone. But they must not spend too much time by going too far afield, else they would not be able to return in time for correction, encouragement and instruction. Jesus Himself had a limited time-schedule too. So Jesus limited their objective for them. (Cf. note 1 on 10:23)*

Someone, on the basis of the strong Jewish prejudices that were probably present in the Apostles themselves, might object, "But would the Apostles even be tempted to go to Gentile or Samaritan cities at this point in their labors, at this crux in their own maturity?" If they were rejected by many Jewish cities, as Jesus here pictures (10:13-15), then they certainly might be so tempted. Also the happy

memories of the unusually warm reception given Jesus by the Samaritans at Sychar might tempt some Apostle to consider such a ministry. (See Jn. 4:1-42)

This very admonition in itself is strong evidence that Jesus never had anything in His mind less than the ultimate goal of WORLD evangelism. This charge, by its very existence here, clarifies the point that Jesus could never have made an unconscious slip that furtively betrays a latent nationalism. For, if a world-wide mission had not already been on the mind of Jesus and the subject of some of His private lessons, or had Jesus constantly hammered on a strictly Jewish Messiahship, there could have been no need for this limitation. His men would never have dreamed of crossing the borders into Gentile or Samaritan country.

II. A PARTICULAR MESSAGE FOR A PARTICULAR PERIOD.

(10:7)

10:7 **And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. As you go, preach** (*poreuðmenoi kērussete*) differs from the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19: *poreuthentes mathēteusate*) at least in form, if not also in emphasis. The command here (10:7) is expressed in the vivid, moving present tense: "Preach as you go" or "Preach on the way;" whereas the Great Commission, by using an aorist participle attached to an aorist tense imperative verb, actually commands the Apostles to begin to go and make disciples. In this latter case (as also in Mk. 16:15, *poreuthentes eis tòn kōsmon . . . kērussate*), the emphasis seems to be upon both the command to go as well as the command to preach or make disciples (See Burton, *Moods*, 173, 174)

Though here (10:7), as in the Great Commission, the same rule applies to the participles, relating them to the function of the principle verb in each case, yet Jesus' emphasis is not so much on the going, as on the preaching while they are going. This is seen immediately when it is remembered that He had already clearly commanded them to go: "Go not" (10:5, *mē apēlthēte*) and "Go" (10:6, *poreuēsthe*). The resultant advance in thought throws the logical emphasis forward to the proclamation while they moved across Galilee.

Why bother with this? Would not the Apostles be tempted to think that they would begin their "official" evangelistic work only when they arrived at such and such a city? But Jesus opens their eyes to every person they encounter as they travel: their travelling companions, the people in whose homes they would enter along

the way. Every one is to hear the good news, not merely those at the destination of the journey. Note also the omission of the prohibition to "salute no man along the road." (Cf. Lk. 10:4)

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Notice the continuity in the revelation of the Messiah and His rule: this had been the message of John the Baptist (3:2), and then of Jesus (See note on 4:17); now it is to be the principal theme broadcast by the Apostles. Why?

1. The Apostles' very messages, thundered before an electrified nation, would identify them immediately in the popular mind with John and Jesus. In the very nature of the case, this was as it should be, for there really is a logical progression and connection in these three steps: the harbinger of the Messiah, the Messiah Himself, then the Messiah's ambassadors. It was imperative, however, that Israel feel this connection, lest it seem to those who saw the Apostles at work that somehow the ministry and following of Jesus had suddenly fragmented into chaotic little groups scattered over the country. Rather than witnessing the sight of six pairs of men all announcing a different gospel, Israel is confronted with Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom of God now on seven different fronts!
2. Repentance and the rule of God is a message always in order. (Cf. Paul's preaching years later, Ac. 20:25) The rejection of God's good government was what made men sinners in the first place: only repentance and submission to God's rule can make men whole again. (Cf. Mk. 6:12)
3. This was the very message that must be proclaimed as ground-work preparation before Jesus could declare the Kingdom.

As suggested by the title of this section, this was but a particular message for a particular period. This is not the type of message that could be preached after the consummation of the great events surrounding the passion, victory and coronation of the King, as well as the commencement of His royal rule on earth. Obviously, the Apostles could not announce facts that had not yet occurred, facts upon which the very Reign of Christ must necessarily be founded. There was much for Jesus yet to do: destroy the fundamental separation between Jew and Gentile, conquer death, offer Himself as the sufficient sacrifice for sin and bring victory to man through His own victory. Before Jesus could seal the universal pact of God with the

world, He must eliminate the old covenant, having fulfilled it. But these grand facts were then all yet future.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Though this was the Apostles' exciting announcement, they were not sufficiently prepared, nor was it Jesus' purpose, to identify Him and His program as messianic. Their task was to prepare the way for Jesus, thus leaving Him free to develop this popular enthusiasm, thus aroused, as He saw best. It is impossible not to speculate whether the Apostles would have been asked by their audiences for the identity of the Christ-King. Since the Apostles would have had to refer this question to Jesus, and since, immediately following this evangelistic tour, we find the multitudes beginning to identify Jesus as the Christ, it is clear that the Twelve themselves did not clearly declare Jesus' Messiahship. Otherwise, the multitudes would not have had to speculate for themselves, had the Twelve openly declared Him to be such. (Cf. Mt. 14:1, 2, 13; Mk. 6:14-16; Lk. 9:7-9; Jn. 6:14, 15) These disciples, then, were to limit themselves to heralding the near arrival of God's kingdom. But this joyous announcement did not exhaust the good news (see Lk. 9:6, *euaggelizòmenoi*), for the coming of God's rule carried with it moral consequences for which Israel was not prepared. Israel must repent! (Mk. 6:12; see notes on 3:2, Vol. I, 94)

III. A PARTICULAR CREDENTIAL FOR A PARTICULAR PERIOD (10:8)

10:8 Heal the sick: see on Mk. 6:12, 13; Lk. 9:6 under point VI of this chapter's outline. **Raise the dead:** though there is no record that the Apostles brought men back from the dead during this early ministry, they certainly did this later (Ac. 9:36-42; 20:9, 10). **Cleanse the lepers:** is this particular type of healing mentioned to show the extent of God's healing power operative in the Twelve, i.e. even to the point of curing such a defiling disease as leprosy? **Cast out demons.** Besides the obvious power over Satan that this represents, does Matthew include this command to display the full range of the glorious power intrusted to the Twelve? If so, why this particular emphasis on demons? (Cf. Mt. 10:1; Mk. 6:7, 13; Lk. 9:1) Is it that Jesus would have them realize that the struggle in which they were engaged was a personal battle with Satan himself? (Cf. Mt. 10:24-29) If so, every victory over demons signalled the establishment of Christ's sovereignty over that much more of the devil's former occupation. When the Seventy returned from their particularly successful mission, they rejoiced especially that they were

able to exorcize demons. Jesus' comment on this was a declaration of the fall of Satan. (Lk. 10:17-20)

Freely ye received, freely give. Morgan (*Matthew*, 104) is quite right to point out that "it is because men have lost the sense of the proportion of our Master's orderly speech that, today, some imagine that all this is still our work. This is not our work. We have no commission to heal the sick miraculously . . ." This commission of those Apostles and early disciples (cf. Lk. 10:9) was the proof of their identity with Jesus' program and their miracles became the evidence of the consequent divine authority. The need for such supernatural credentials disappeared once the kingdom of Jesus had been proclaimed throughout the entire earth. (Cf. Col. 1:6, 23; I Th. 1:8) They disappeared, because in the nature of the case they were no longer needed to authenticate the message as from God, since this fact had been well established.

While it may be true that the need for SUPERNATURAL healings, as special credentials authenticating the divinity of the message, has passed, yet even today mercifulness, expressed in practical ways and in proper subordination to the message proclaimed, becomes a powerful credential in the thinking of the unbelieving world. The same generous spirit behind the Apostles' healings can motivate Christians today to share what they have to provide certain necessities of life (hospitals, schools, primary necessities, etc.), a gesture which convinces the doubters and wrings from the scoffers the confession that "these Christians really care about a man!" But the modern Christian must not confuse this generosity with evangelism. This help is only one among many credentials that lends credibility to the message (Cf. Jn. 17:21, 23), since it shows the consistency between the Christians' message and their practice. It shows that God is really producing through the Gospel the very persons that the Gospel is supposed to produce. There may be many opportunities to evangelize a people otherwise unreachable, whose hearts are thus opened to receive the Gospel. But the work of the doctor, teacher or school (or hospital) administrator is not missionary evangelism and should not be called such. How many doctors, teachers, administrators on mission fields have gotten bogged down in the sheer mechanics of their professional work and find that they have no more opportunity to proclaim the very message that challenged them to take up their work in the first place. They might have gained insight from Jesus' own refusal to let His ministry be primarily a miraculous medical practice. He felt frustrated when people wanted to use Him for

their own private purposes and steadfastly refused to get overly concerned about His message. A person can be a missionary anywhere in the world today regardless of his profession by which he earns his living, but he is a missionary because he is first of all a Christian in that place, not because he is a teacher or healer. A person has to decide his usefulness as a missionary by how well he is able to express the Gospel incarnate in his own life in that place, given the limitations imposed upon him by the situation itself.

Freely ye received, freely give. This sentence contains the most profound statement of the whole character of Christianity, as well as the practical expression of it in the Apostles' personal lives and ministry. God's gracious mercy has not given anything to anyone, including the Twelve, on the basis of their having deserved it. Characteristically, the very Christianity thus given by God, has the power in it to cause men, who share Jesus' mentality, to be just this generous. These men had already seen this unlimited, generous spirit in Jesus Himself. (4:23, 24; 9:35) Whereas the Lord Himself constantly, unselfishly and disinterestedly expended all the power of heaven to meet the needs of suffering humanity, although He could have charged dearly for His goods and services, yet He shared as He did out of that pure motivation of unmixed concern for those people He loved and who needed His help. His own pattern of giving out of His own merciful passion to share, only for the sake of those He served, expecting no pay in return, now becomes the standard by which His people model and judge their own giving.

Jesus is saying to His men: I have charged you no tuition for all the lessons in the Kingdom of God, I have charged you nothing for the power to work stupendous miracles in my name, there is no fee for admission into the band of Apostles. In terms of monetary value, all this has cost you nothing, since I chose to give it to you without charge. Now, since you are but responsible administrators of this stewardship, you are not to act as if you were the owners of it with full power to dispense it at any price you choose to command. These free gifts are merely given you on their way to others!" It would be so easy to make the miracles a lucrative source of income and be able to justify it on the basis of its value, while at the same time suggesting that the money would be used for the support of Jesus' ministry. But so to have employed them would have reduced the miracles to mere articles of trade and robbed them of their power as evidence of the presence and activity of God in the world of men.

The very ambiguity of the phrase "Freely you have received,"

unclear in the sense that the Giver is not clearly identified, reinforces the earlier comment (10:1) that Jesus and God are somehow to be closely identified, since obviously it was Jesus who gave them this power, while anyone with the moral sense to see would know that this power was God's.

How do we harmonize this demand, that the Apostles help people without charging for their services, with the comforting remark that "the laborer is worthy of his food" (10:10), or "worthy of his wage" (Lk. 10:7)? The Apostles and other laborers must freely bestow their great gifts without charge of any kind. They will have already seen to their food and lodging, however, by having sought out the godly people of a community whose hospitality saw to those needs. As will be seen on 10:10, the "worthiness" intended is in no way based upon the Apostles' distribution of miracles, but a recognition of the value of the work they are doing. It is not a purchase, on the part of the householder, of some special miraculous gift, nor is it an exchange of some miraculous gift, on the part of an Apostle, for hospitality. (See on 10:10)

IV. A PARTICULAR METHOD FOR A PARTICULAR PERIOD (10:9-15)

In this section Jesus is dealing with the fundamental question on the mind of any reasonable, far-sighted man: how were these workers of His to be supported during their labors? To the modern westerner, and perhaps to the Apostles themselves, unused as they were to the *modus operandi* here outlined, Jesus' words cannot but strike a tone of madness. As we read through the instructions, we are made immediately aware that Jesus is literally stripping His men of every visible means of support. We would have expected that Jesus give His men every possible advantage in order to carry out their mission but here He deliberately orders them to dispense with all those accoutrements men usually think necessary for a journey of the nature they are about to undertake! While the Twelve themselves would have admitted that these instructions were proper for the rabbis, yet, psychologically, they might well have had some difficulty seeing themselves accepting the customary courtesies and generous hospitality usually accorded those venerated men. After all, in their own view, the Apostles may still see themselves as converted publicans, fishermen and what-not. They may feel they are entering a world where they do not belong, where "they do not know their place." Yet, this consideration does not hinder Jesus for a moment from placing His men to this initial test under real-life conditions.

The specific commands of the Lord in this section become to the Twelve but the practical application of Jesus' proscription of anxiety for material needs, seen in the Sermon on the Mount. He practically strips them of their self-reliance, so that they HAVE to go out in the confidence that God would always see to it that faithful men in each locality would receive them and provide for their needs during their labors there. Later, Jesus tests them on this very point: "Did you lack anything, when I sent you out without anything?" Their terse but eloquent reply was, "Nothing." (Lk. 22:35f) Bruce (*Training*, 108) summarizes this section so neatly:

His instructions proceeded on the principle of division of labor, assigning to the servants of the kingdom military duty and to God the commissariat department.

Lest we overemphasize the uncertainties of the situation into which Jesus sent His men, let us remember here that Jesus orders His men on a short tour of just a few weeks (see on 10:1), after which He will definitely revoke these limitations mentioned in this section. (Lk. 22:35-38) These men were to labor among their own people, among orientals to whom hospitality was a sacred honor and obligation. Further, the Apostles themselves were to carry out a ministry of teaching and healing that would, in a sense, earn themselves the esteem and recognition of those who would open to them their homes. While some of the instructions in this section will definitely be changed later, due to the changed nature of the ministry which the Twelve and the early Christians will then have to perform, this does not mean that Jesus changed His method on the supposition that this earlier technique failed. The change of instructions simply means that Jesus accomplished His original plans for the early training missions of the Apostles among their own people, then changed His directives to match new situations. Under the universal commission (Mt. 28:19, 20), they would be evangelizing in distant lands among widely varying mentalities regarding hospitality toward strangers and regarding providing the daily needs of religious leaders. Hence, because they could not then depend upon a relatively uniform Jewish hospitality in pagan lands, they needed a different method of operation. It would be a drastic mistake to apply these rules, given here for a limited operation, to any mission of the Apostles or other evangelists in pagan lands after Jesus' ascension.

10.9 Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses. The expression: **get you no gold . . .** must be taken in the sense: "Do not procure . . ." (*kiēsēsthe*), since Mark and Luke's

parallels at this point put the antithetical emphasis on what the men should (nor should not) take along. (Mk. 6:8, *hairōsin*; Lk. 9:3, *hairēte*). Also, this "getting" refers to their preparations for (their) journey (Mk. 6:8; Lk. 9:3; cf. Mt. 10:10). The "getting," then, has no reference to the Apostles' seeking these things mentioned, during their journey, as if they would expect to be paid for their ministry by receiving these items mentioned at the hand of those who benefit from their work. Jesus is not talking about receiving anything DURING the journey, but preparation for the journey. Their "getting" refers to the provisions they would otherwise have gotten together before undertaking the trip. They were to go exactly as they were, with no extra supplies beyond what was needed for "the absolutely immediate present." (Edersheim) Jesus is saying, "Do not take those things travelers generally regard as indispensibly essential. Go confident that your needs will be provided. Let all your concern be centered upon your work, not upon yourselves." This distinction between the "getting" as preparation for the trip, and the "getting," suggested by some, as support received from those benefitting from the Apostles' ministry, is not so important in itself, as an expression of the meaning of this single text. Rather, it is important as a key that unlocks the supposed mystery involved in verses that follow, especially the supposed contradiction between the Synoptists regarding what the Apostles were to take along during their journey. It is the failure to note this distinction that has kept reasonable men from seeing the possible harmony between the Gospel writers at this point.

No gold . . . silver . . . brass means money for groceries, lodging and other essential expenses. **In your purses**, or "girdles" (KJV) or "belts" (RSV) expresses the same function as modern moneybelts, since the sash or leather belt provided just this convenience of carrying valuables close to the body, besides holding the robe in place. (It should be no surprise that robbers strip a man, not only to have his fine robe, but to get at his money belt! Cf. Lk. 10:30)

10:10 **No wallet for your journey.** **Wallet** (*pēra*) may be simply a small suitcase, "a knapsack or traveler's bag . . . but perhaps this passage has in mind the more specialized meaning *beggar's bag*. . . . Such a bag was part of a Cynic itinerant preacher's equipment . . . Such a bag was also used by shepherds . . ." (Arndt-Gingrich, 662) If it be the beggar's wallet that is meant, this requirement means that the Apostles were to consider the help they receive from generous hosts as salary, not beggar's alms. In a sense they will have

actually earned (cf. Lk. 10:7) what is given, so they are to accept what is offered graciously, but with the clear understanding that by their spiritual ministry they will have earned it. If the suitcase idea is in the Lord's mind, then He is saying, "If you are not going to take along a lot of special provisions, food, clothing and other equipment, you are not going to need a bag to carry it in!"

As we consider what the Twelve must (or must not) include, it would be helpful here to list the items side by side:

They were NOT TO PROCURE OR TAKE:	They were to TAKE ALONG:
Money Bread (food) Bag for the journey A (new or extra) staff Two tunics (one extra) An extra pair of sandals	The one staff they had The one tunic they wore The sandals they had on.

This interpretative analysis seeks to harmonize some of the otherwise seemingly contradictory details where the Synoptists seem to disagree. **Neither two coats:** presumably they would take the one they had on, but were not to provide themselves with another one for a spare. However, **coats**, as such, is not the question here but *tunics* (*chitōnas*), a garment worn next to the skin by both sexes, a shirt. (Arndt-Gingrich, 890) See Mt. 5:40 for a good example of this distinction from that cloak or robe which should properly be called a coat. **Nor shoes**, rather, specifically *sandals* (*hypodēmata*): "a leather sole that is fastened to the foot by means of straps." (Arndt-Gingrich, 852) These are not shoes in the modern understanding of the word. Since Mark (6:9 records Jesus as requiring His men to wear sandals (*sandalia*), presumably He means that His men are to wear the pair they have on, in whatever condition they may be, but are not to procure another pair for the journey. **Nor a staff:** while it is simple to harmonize Matthew with Mark's (6:8) "take nothing except a staff . . ." by saying they were not to take time procuring another staff in addition to the one already in hand, it is more complicated to harmonize with Luke's forthright "Take nothing . . . no staff." Three solutions are possible:

1. Luke's (9:3) "no staff" has exactly the same force as Matthew's (10:10) "nor staff," and means to convey no more than "Do not take time to procure a staff."

2. Since the habit of some of the Apostles may not have been to use a walking stick in their long marches with the Master, they are here ordered not to make even that much special provision.
3. If it be asked whether a man would use two staffs in journeying, we have a third possible solution: "Since you are not going to be carrying a lot of extra provisions or an extra bag, you will not need an extra staff over your shoulder on which to carry those things."

If it be objected that in every case where an apparent contradiction between the Synoptists arises, we have presumed an extra item as a spare, then let it be noticed that Jesus Himself points the way to this solution. All three Evangelists record the prohibition: "Do not take two tunics," a fact which shows the spirit of the entire section: "Take nothing extra, nothing beyond what you have with you right at this moment." Reinforced with this one illustration, consistently reported by all three Synoptists, the proposition is more than probable that we may deal similarly with the other items, which seem to us who read the lists, not to have been reported consistently. Finally, one of the axioms of the harmony of all truth is that if a satisfactory harmony can be shown between two apparently contradictory facts, they may not be said to be contradictions, regardless of the degree of apparent contradiction.

For the laborer is worthy of his food. This is the reason the Lord adduces for giving the foregoing instructions. They will not need to make careful preparations along the lines suggested above, since another higher principle will be operative in this case. In verses 11-14 Jesus will make specific what is here stated in principle.

Food states in one word all that is necessary to sustain the men's life and work. The disciples were to accept just what was offered, without demanding something more or something different: if it is **food**, he is not to be fastidious; if it is enough, he is not to be greedy. (Cf. Lk. 10:8)

The laborer is worthy: "The Apostle who has really worked at the ministry to which I have sent him, will have really earned all he gets." It should not at all surprise us to hear Jesus use the word "wage" (*misthōn*) in Lk. 10:7 in regard to another mission, but with reference to the evangelists' support. How encouraging this declaration must have been to men who, though Apostles in name and partly so by training, were but timid beginners. "You men are WORTHY of all the support you get." There can be no doubting this truth,

since these fledgling Apostles while in the homes shared their true spiritual treasure. In fact, they gave much more than they ever received back in food and lodging! This very principle is the basis of Paul's argument that those who proclaim the Gospel should receive their livelihood from those who accept the Gospel. (I Co. 9:14; I Tim. 5:17, 18) This support for God's workers, then, comes from those open-handed people who recognize the validity of the work the Christian workers are carrying forward. "This," says Jesus surprisingly, "is to be God's provision for you men. He shall not provide miraculous bread (as, for example, the support of Elijah at Kerith and Zerephath), but common bread given by godly people."

Worthy: Jesus sets a high value on the men because of the special ministry they were to perform for Him. "You are worthy of whatever help you receive. But in my view, those people who receive you will be judged worthy also. If they do not receive you, they are not worthy and will be condemned. Their true worth is determined by whether they receive you or not." (Cf. 10:11-15)

This is all good theory if it will work. The Apostles, immediately upon beginning their first mission, were going to find out whether or not it is practical to trust Jesus' theories. They themselves were going to have to live literally by faith. Even though they had been seeking the Kingdom of God with a more or less single-mindedness and were more or less already unconcerned about food, clothing and shelter ever since they began to accompany Jesus in His travels, yet now the immediate security of Jesus' person is going to be taken away temporarily. Until now Jesus had been with them, and the ultimate responsibility for such matters devolved generally upon Him. Now, however, they were to work without Him for a short period, literally living from day to day, with no forethought or preparation for these normal, human necessities of life. Is it not merciful of Jesus to toughen His men to the realities of faith and to the habit of depending upon God in this practical way? His approach to their weakness and need for this practical experience in trusting God is psychologically sound in its gradualness, in its definiteness, and in the element of real risk these men recognized. This was no mere drill, no false alert: it is the real thing, but on a level where the men themselves could respond at the level of their own growth.

10:11 And into whatsoever city or village ye shall enter, search out who in it is worthy. This is the tactic the Apostles are to use in order to secure themselves food and lodging before they ever mention a word about the mission on which they have been sent.

There is to be no necessary connection between their being ambassadors of Jesus of Nazareth and the hospitality they required, as if the former were a condition of the latter, at least when the Apostles were making these preliminary inquiries for hospitality. Of course, as they become the guests of people, these will learn of their mission. Should these then thrust them out of their houses, out of antipathy to Jesus, then their mission becomes a condition of their hospitality (or rejection).

What kind of inquiry is here required? Is it probable that the Apostles went around asking who were the best, most godly people in town, most noted for their hospitality? Why not? If the elders of the city, sitting in the city gate, cannot tell you immediately several names of such people, out of oriental courtesy one of the elders themselves may take you into his home. (Cf. Gen. 19:1-3) So the indirect question "who in town is worthy (?)" is answered by the estimate of the townspeople themselves: "This family (or that) is worthy." Would the Apostles have gone door-to-door seeking lodging without first talking to the city fathers? Would the city fathers be likely to suggest the best homes of their city to strangers, without first making some inquiry into the business that brings these strangers into town? The answers to these questions depend upon whatever mentality or attitude toward travelers the Jews in general of that period may have had.

Why is this inquiry important? Three reasons suggest themselves:

1. Because the messengers and their message would be marked for good or ill by the known character of those who received them cordially into their home. Though they were to proclaim a Gospel for all, "publicans and sinners" included, yet the high holiness and importance of the message must not be able to be spoken against merely because of an imprudent choice of hosts whose character or notoriety scandalizes potential hearers. The Apostles themselves would all too soon be marked as "unworthy" men, due to their association with Jesus of Nazareth and their fundamental and necessary opposition to the traditions of the fathers. In this work they would need every advantage they could gain. In the eyes of the people their association with the truly righteous people in a city would tend to sanction their mission as from God. (While it is true that that generousness of spirit that manifests itself in hospitality toward strangers is no always present ingredient in the practical godliness of people deemed ortho-

dox, worthy or pious, yet true godliness tends to produce in the godly this characteristic generosity.)

2. Another obvious importance of this injunction is to reduce, in the disciples themselves, any sensitivity about accepting the hospitality of others. As humble disciples of the lowly Nazarene, they might have been inclined unwittingly to downgrade their own program by not going directly to the best people. After all, they might have argued, what right have we to be wined and dined as if we were the highest rabbis in the land? But so to have reasoned would have been to have missed the supreme importance of their own mission. They would be no mere rabbis, but the royal ambassadors of the King of the Universe!
3. Further, and probably a factor much more important than either the public image of the Apostles or their own personal hesitancy, is the advantage of a nucleus of believers from which to work. Assuming that the truly "worthy" of a city were also godly Jews, looking for the Kingdom of God in deeply spiritual terms, these people would be the most receptive to the Apostles' message and could form within Judaism cell groups of believers in Jesus. After Pentecost these could be turned into congregations of the Church. (Study the working from fixed centers in each town in the later mission of the Apostles: "The Church in their house" of Ro. 16:5, 11, 14, 15, 23; I Co. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2.)

Into whatsoever city or village ye shall enter, search out who in it is worthy. Feel the infectious confidence of the Master, also pointed out by Bruce (*Training*, 110):

He took for granted, that there would always be found at every place at least one good man with a warm heart, who would welcome the messengers of the kingdom to his house and table for the pure love of God and of the truth. Surely no unreasonable assumption! It were a wretched hamlet, not to say town, that had not a single worthy person in it. Even wicked Sodom had a Lot within its walls who could entertain angels unawares.

And this confidence could not help but infect the Apostles with the certainty that the mission on which He sends them is no fool's errand, but a campaign carefully planned down to the last detail.

There abide till ye go forth. (Cf. Lk. 10:7, "Remain in the

same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house.") The fundamental emphasis here is stability and contentment, excellent virtues that recommend those who possess them:

1. Stability, because no momentum would be lost by an endless round of feasting. Thomas (*Land and Book*, cited by PHC, 249) testifies that

oriental hospitality involves a practical system, including a round of visits, involving much ostentation and hypocrisy. It is time-consuming, mind-distracting, leads to levity and in just about every way, counteracts the success of a spiritual mission. The very nature of the Apostles' work demanded serious concentration.

Even if the modest circumstances of the hosts did not permit so lavish an entertainment in view of the Apostles' intention to remain in a town longer than would be accorded other travellers passing through, still it was not their mission to be entertained, but to proclaim the Kingdom. This single-mindedness, obvious in the attitude of the Apostles, testified to the townspeople that these men valued their time, had important business to attend to and needed to be free to work. It is very difficult to carry on work when one must constantly keep an eye on the luncheon calendar or on the dinner memos. It is not impossible, if people properly understand your work, but especially difficult if they do not or else refuse to collaborate.

2. Contentment, because if they wandered around like mendicant monks or appeared to be dissatisfied with the hospitality of the people, or as idle men fond of change, people would hardly take them seriously or give their message a second thought. Though not sins per se, being connoisseurs of fine foods and rare wines was not for the Apostles.

Jesus' advice is a question of emphasis and common sense. Neither banquets nor wide-ranging hospitality are wrong; they just get in the way of serious, sustained work. A different bed every night, ranging from extra hard to lumpy and a new cook every day who is trying to out-do her predecessor in providing the finest feast -the visitors ever saw, is enough to kill any Apostle!

10:12 **And as ye enter into the house**, i.e., the house chosen in the manner described above, **salute it**. (Cf. Lk. 10:5, "Whatever

house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!') *Salute . . . peace* are practically equivalent terms, since the Jewish "Shalom" is not only a greeting, but a prayer that the peace of God bless those thus greeted. (Cf. Jn. 20:19, 26. The antithesis is 2 Jn. 10. See also the introductions with which the Apostles begin their letters as well as many of the concluding salutations, e.g. 2 Th. 3:16; 1 Pet. 5:14; 3 Jn. 15) Jesus urges His followers to be friendly, courteous and respectful toward those who might serve as hosts for the Gospel proclamation in a village. There is no bullying here, no insisting upon special rights to hospitality as Jesus' messengers, no demanding clergy discounts. He requires them to show the customary regard, following the common rules of social behavior. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:12-24; 3:8-11) They are to cultivate a spirit of good will. Good public relations are necessary, but this must be gained without compromise of principle. Even though we cannot, and must not, leave people comfortable in the deadly state of unrepentant sin, yet our generous friendliness and obvious good will that treats them as people with whom we hope to live in harmony, can be the means of opening their mind to the gospel we preach.

10:13 And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. The Apostles were intending to bring the Kingdom of God itself to that home, with all its benefits and blessings! People could hardly guess what really stood there at the door in the person of the Lord's Apostles, but if they opened their homes to receive them, all these marvelous favors would be theirs. If they fail to hear the voice of God in these humble Galilean preachers, they forfeit their key to God's treasury. Nevertheless that which the Apostles so earnestly desired to give them, would come back to the givers themselves. So the Twelve are not to be at all discouraged by even this set-back, knowing that they may even rejoice in rejection for Jesus' sake. (Cf. Mt. 5:10-12) God's peace will hold them stable in such storms. This, of course, can never diminish the tragedy of every refusal to accept the Apostles' message.

If the house be worthy . . . not worthy. It may not immediately appear whether a house is really worthy, in the sense that it accepts the Apostles for sake of the Person and message of Jesus that they bring. Some time may elapse before it becomes clear whether the house is really "worthy" in the highest sense of the word. So the Apostles are not to stand outside the door and wait for the householder to decide whether to permit them, as messengers of

Jesus of Nazareth, to enter. **If it be not worthy** cannot be construed to mean that the Apostles made a mistake about the worthiness of the house, since their inquiries in town led the townspeople to agree that this household was "worthy," in the general sense of "generous, hospitable." But, although a generous, open-hearted family is usually open to new truth, it is not always so. Upon learning the nature of the Apostles' purpose, the householder, driven by prejudices, prudence or other motives, may reject and eject the Apostles because of their mission and views.

Here Jesus' practical instructions accord perfectly with His theory. He has taught the disciples that evangelistic efforts will not produce the same results in every area, hamlet or human heart. (Cf. Mt. 13:18-23) Now as He sends His men forth to begin their own sowing of the seed, He warns them not to expect equal success everywhere: some cities and homes would receive them; some would not.

In relation to the general question of application of this section to the general pattern of history Jesus seems to be describing (see on the introduction of chapter 10), let it be noted here that even in those cases where a house or city that rejects the Apostles, there is no suggestion of a clearly defined persecution. Morgan (*Matthew*, 103) is probably right in saying:

He was rejected, but they were treated with respect, even by the crowds. The crowds argued with them, tried to understand what relation they bore to Jesus, asked them what Christ meant by certain things; but did not persecute them.

While it is probably true that the Twelve were not unaware of the rejection of Jesus by the large majority of the ruling class and by many of the common people—and especially so as the Apostles themselves became more and more aware of the spiritual nature of His claims and intentions—even so, this rejection still did not bring direct persecution to the Apostles until after Jesus' ascension. This latter act left the Apostles, the obvious successors to the crucified Nazarene, exposed to the wrath of the Master's enemies. Only then did they feel the full force of real persecution.

10:14 **And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as you go forth out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.** His very foresight and instructions are geared to defeat discouragement by simple rejection or disappointment by difficulties. For Jesus, it is not enough that they simply leave town. Rather, He outlines specific directions what to do in the event some refuse to be won, do not receive them and

obviously close the doors to all further conversation. The Twelve are to act in a specific way which takes away the initiative from their would-be detractors. Even if their words could not be said so as to be heard, because people were hurling insults too loud to permit the Apostles a last word, or because people shut their ears (Cf. Ac. 7:57), the Apostles' last message was to be a pantomime. Another very clear symbolic act that conveys the same meaning is a real or pantomimed washing of one's hands of the whole matter. Remember Pilate. Paul shook his garments. (Ac. 18:6) In this silent witness, the Apostles were relieving themselves of the responsibility for the judgment of that house or city. (Cf. Ezek. 3:16-21; 33:7-9) It is significant that Jesus gave them something very specific to remember to do in such a moment, since the Twelve might otherwise be tempted to call fire from heaven to incinerate the opposition!

The dust meant here is literally the street dust on the Apostles' sandals, easily picked up on one's feet while walking along the often unpaved streets of the towns. (Remember here the practical usefulness and kind courtesy involved in washing someone's feet, or at least in providing water so that he himself can do it. Lk. 7:44; Jn. 13:4-16) But **dust** had become a Jewish symbol for the moral responsibility for something described in the phrase "the dust of —." (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 644) Brushing the dust off their shoes, then, becomes the vivid warning to the citizens of a city that rejected the Apostles, that they hereby discharge themselves of any further responsibility for the fate of **that house or city**. Its meaning is clear: the Apostles were preaching their last sermon in this symbolic act: "Your blood be on your own heads; we are blameless and leave you to your doom. While you reject us and our message, the fact remains that you ARE responsible for what we have tried to tell you. The kingdom of God HAS actually come near you, but you rejected it. (Cf. Lk. 10:11) Now that we have fulfilled our mission to your city, we hereby remove every trace of our responsibility for your salvation."

It has been noticed by some commentators that the dust of Gentile territories was considered by the Jews to be defiling, in which case the Apostles are seen as treating those cities which reject them in the same fashion as if they were Gentile cities. These see the Apostles as brushing the dust of defiling unbelief from their feet, or something of the sort. Granted that certain Jews viewed the dust of Gentile lands as defiling, would Jesus accede to this Pharisaic concept even to provide His ambassadors a vivid warning to use in the

event of their rejection? Perhaps, since He might use popular language or ideas that convey a clear meaning, even though both He and the Apostles were clearly antagonistic to the fundamental notion involved in the language. (Even the language purists of the Christian faith today speak of Pope Paul VI, even though they deeply reject all the unfounded pretensions upon which his position and title is based, for example. They use this title and name, simply because not many people would know who or what is meant if they started talking about Giovanni Battista Montini, the pope's real name.) One should be careful about pushing this argument too far, since Jesus clearly teaches elsewhere, what really defiles a man. So we know that He knows that mere dust, whatever its origin, is not defiling. But when, for example, Jesus cites the OT books as being authored by those ancients whose names they have traditionally borne, and He cites them without correction or comment, this is revelation, not mere accession to popular language or merely traditional notions.

Should anyone object to the morality of leaving a city or home to its own moral doom, with no more apparent doggedness and merciful patience in seeking to win its inhabitants to fundamental acceptance of the Kingdom of God than is expressed here in this text, it is sufficient here to respond that this instruction must be interpreted in the context of this first training mission of the Twelve. Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 380) has it:

This is an instruction that . . . comes from the situation in which it was given. It was simply due to the time factor; time was short; as many as possible must hear the proclamation of the Kingdom; at that time there was not time to argue with the disputatious and to seek to win the stubborn; that would come later.

If we have understood correctly the time-outline of Jesus' message here given, Pentecost follows, not precedes, this first rapid mission of the Twelve. So there was time for patient labor later, but not on this trip. Further, since we find a similar expression in the practice of the Apostles at a later period (Ac. 13:51; 18:6), it is important that we recognize the fundamental distinction between the function of the Apostles who must blaze new, unknown truth from city to city throughout the world, and that of those pastors and teachers who remain in a town to minister patiently, mercifully seeking to convince the unconvinced however long that process takes.

While Luke 10:10, 11 is not strictly parallel to this text, it

nevertheless gives the best, full commentary on what the Apostles' attitude and actions must be. Bruce (*Training*, 111) draws this mature judgment about that text:

Solemn words, not to be uttered, as they are too apt to be, especially by young and inexperienced disciples, in pride, impatience, or anger, but (they are to be uttered) humbly, calmly, deliberately, as a part of God's message to men. When uttered in any other spirit, it is a sign that the preacher has been as much to blame as the hearer for the rejection of his message. Few have any right to utter such words at all; for it requires rare preaching indeed to make the fault of unbelieving hearers so great that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for them. But such preaching has been . . . by the apostles.

Even this last word of the Apostles to a city or home is an act of mercy, for it leaves the uncompromising message of faithful Apostles firmly fixed in the mind of any standing among the unbelievers, who might yet be won later. Even this firm, stern warning is to be given in the spirit of: "Bless and curse not." (I Pet. 3:9; Ro. 12:14)

10:15 Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. Jesus reaches back into patriarchal history (Gen. 19:1-28) for the event that most vividly pictures God's swift, terrible punishing power and comes up with the cremation alive of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose obdurate wickedness was so notorious and so demanding divine justice that the greater marvel is not their spectacular punishment, but the patience and mercy of God to let them live as long as He did! This destruction is used by Jesus as a point of comparison between the lot of these cities and the destiny of those cities who rejected the Apostles' message. This comparison is the more vivid for the Jews who were accustomed to thinking of these cities as particularly wicked, deserving punishment. (Cf. Mt. 11:24; Ro. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7; Dt. 29:23; Is. 1:9, 10; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 49:18, etc.)

Perhaps it would be more advantageous to deal with the evidential value of this text in a separate article. (See the special study: "Jesus' Witness to Old Testament Inspiration" by John Ransom in this Volume.) However, one cannot help noticing the seriousness with which the Lord presents this illustrative point of comparison. He treats both the incident of the destruction of those ancient cities as well

as the written source from which the incident is derived as if the whole narrative about them were serious, sober history and the document (*Genesis*) which contains it as entirely to be relied upon. It is not enough to say that Jesus merely cites a legendary (hence, somehow, fictitious) tale of a horrible destruction to give particular point to His declaration regarding those cities that reject His messengers. If it be thought that He merely appeals to a traditional story accepted by the Apostles as historically true, but objectively reducible to the level of undocumented ancient tradition,—an appeal for which Jesus, as a speaker borrowing allusions without Himself authenticating their origin or validity, cannot be held responsible—then, the following reasons may be offered for the conclusion that Jesus IS responsible for the true information about the origin and validity of the facts out of the Old Testament He is using and by His use He is revealing truth regarding those books about which it is, at best, now difficult to verify the authenticity:

1. In general, Jesus clearly reveals His divergence from commonly-held mistaken Jewish notions. It may be reasonably supposed that He would not fail to do so on the question of the authorship or authenticity of OT books or facts, where-insofar His own arguments depended upon those books or facts. But in none of His citations or allusions to OT books or events does He once make an editorial correction or "necessary" emendation of this problem that is so vital to our knowledge of OT facts and origins.
2. There is here, also, a moral question: can Jesus remain consistent with His own advertised ethic, when at the same time He is demanding of others absolute honesty and thoughtful helpfulness, He Himself fails to disabuse His misled followers of their dependence upon the OT books then available to them and their mistaken belief of the facts contained therein?
3. Further, can Jesus be the revealer of the mind of God, as He claims, when at the same time He is going around basing His pretensions upon books, accounts or passages that modern Biblical criticism would seek to reduce to legends, fables, traditions or, at best, "later accretions of a kernel of (true) fact"?

In order to deal with these questions properly, each should be taken separately as a theme to develop as argument for the conclusion offered. But these questions DO raise problems for those who would discount wholesale entire sections of OT Scripture as devoid of

historical value, i.e. from which no certain knowledge of ancient facts may be derived. So, Jesus' mention of the cremation of Sodom and Gomorrah has real point, since, unless Jesus tells us elsewhere that that miracle did not, in fact, take place (which, according to the available materials in the four Gospels, He does not do), Jesus Himself may be said to accept the reality of the painful punishment of those perverts.

But what is the exact point of (unequal) comparison here? Jesus is saying, "If you think that the certainly merited, but unspeakably horrible, punishment merited out on Sodom and Gomorrah was terrible, let me assure you that I consider rejection of you Apostles and disbelief of my message to bear as such a far more evident proof of wickedness, that the doom of those unbelievers, who dare turn down your offers of divine mercy, will be even more so. It will actually go easier for those ancients when they face the final judgment, than for these moderns who will have turned their backs on God's Kingdom!"

But why should Jesus' condemnation of those cities that do not receive the Apostles be so severe? How could it be **more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city?**

1. Was it because those hamlets or homes that rejected the Twelve principally because they came as ambassadors of Jesus of Nazareth, would be guiltier than the great, wicked metropolises of antiquity who knew not the identity of the messengers of God who came among them? But did the inhabitants of Sodom ever learn the identity of the apparently normal men who were Lot's guests? There is no connection made in the text, between their being stricken blind and the identity of the angels who so struck them. Nor is there any evidence of an angelic visit to Gomorrah, such as that to Sodom, inasmuch as God's interest in these cities was the rescue of Lot for Abraham's sake, His judgment having already predetermined the devastation of these cities. So it does not appear that the identity of the messengers itself is the point of the comparison.
2. It would be more correct to say that the Sodomites and those of Gomorrah, however indescribably wicked they may have been, had had no opportunities to know God's message, equal to the opportunities of those to whom Christ's Apostles preached. (See notes on Mt. 11:20-24) Guilt is based upon opportunity to know the truth. While the Jews' rejection

of the Apostles, relatively speaking, is not such a bad sin, gross, flagrant and foul as that of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet it is so much more inexcusable and worthy of so much more excruciating severity, since the Jews would have had a more excellent chance to know the truth and act upon it. Lenski (*Matthew*, 397) shows why it should go harder for disbelievers than for Sodomites:

To lie in sin and thus to perish is bad;

To lie in sin and, in addition, to reject grace, and thus to perish, is worse.

3. Jesus is so hard on the disbelievers who shut their ears to the Apostles, since He knows that the Gospel they preach is the opportunity of a lifetime that once rejected might never return. The Gospel appeal might never again be felt.
 - a. Having once successfully resisted the appeal of the message, they may well rest content in having maintained their orthodoxy and their faithfulness to the traditions of their fathers by repudiating this upstart Nazarene and his band, hence be more confirmed than ever in their unbelief.
 - b. They might die before the Apostles or early Christian evangelists can bring the Word around to them again. (See on 10:23) Historically, this occurred in Palestine, since the Apostles could not finish evangelizing even that small country before the horrible death by persecution and martyrdom of the majority of the Apostles themselves and the smashing juggernaut of the Roman might which devastated the nation, hurled the Jews into a black eternity without another occasion to hear the message of grace.

By means of this grand and awesome declaration, Jesus accomplishes two purposes:

1. He clinches His argument about the reliability of support from God through His people. God, whose laborers they are, not only fully recognizes their need for support, but He is especially concerned whether they received it or not, while carrying out their ministry for Him. So concerned is He that He would notice even the dust on their feet and what it testified to Him about the Apostles' reception in a given area! So, if God may be depended upon to vindicate His messengers' word as His own, how much more sure is He to provide their every need in exactly the way He promises them to do so?

2. He gives evidence of His own deity and divine authority. Jesus has just declared that those wicked cities, overthrown by God, will actually have it (comparatively) easier than any city or house that refuses His own Apostles. He must be the Judge Himself to be able so confidently to announce the outcome of what is most surely known to God, the final judgment!

In the day of judgment. Though Jesus is already announcing some of the verdicts of that final day, He does so in a more or less private way to His disciples, whereas on that great day He will render these verdicts public before the whole universe. But the disturbing nature of these declarations could not escape these men, and we must not miss them either: judgment is certain. As certainly as God's punishment rained down upon those wicked cities, so certainly will the impenitent cities (and, in our day, those schools of theology) that laugh the Apostles and their disciples out of town, face their ruin at last.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What specific area were the Apostles to evangelize?
2. What specific ethnic groups were the Twelve to avoid at this time?
3. Explain the wisdom of Jesus in this choice, in relationship to the Apostles' personal ability, maturity and preparation.
4. Show what motives prompted Jesus to commission these twelve men to work at this particular task.
5. On what other occasion is there a similar commission given to some disciples, thus enrolling them in Jesus' ministry?
6. What message were the Apostles to preach? What did the message mean?
7. What was the purpose of the miracles in the ministry of the Twelve?
8. What were the Apostles to "freely give"? What was it that they had "freely received"?
9. Explain what is meant by the instructions to "salute the house," "your peace will come upon it," and "your peace will return to you."
10. What is the meaning of the oriental expression: "Shake off the dust of your feet"? Is Jesus to be taken literally or figuratively here? What would this expression have meant to the Apostles? Should we try to apply the same attitude involved in this expression today? Give a good 20th Century paraphrase for this expression, showing thereby your application.

CHAPTER TEN

11. List the items the Apostles were to take along during their journeys.
12. List the items the Apostles were NOT to take along.
13. Locate and give the history of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in such a way as to show the impact of the warning behind Jesus' words that for that city which rejected the Apostles' message it would go worse on judgment day than for those ancient cities.
14. Do the restrictions Jesus placed upon this mission apply to every mission the Apostles are to perform? What evidence do you offer for your answer?
15. State the declarations in this section that emphasize the divine authority of Jesus.
16. Harmonize the apparently contradictory instructions regarding the disciples' taking "shoes or sandals" and "staves." Were the disciples to take no staff nor shoes or at least one pair or what?

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE
APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

III. JESUS CHALLENGES AND HONESTLY
WARNS THE TWELVE OF THE DANGERS
AND DIFFICULTIES THAT LIE AHEAD

TEXT: 10:16-31

A. PERSECUTION BY THE STATE "CHURCH"

(10:16, 17)

16. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.
17. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you;

B. PERSECUTION BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT

(10:18)

18. Yea and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

C. PROMISE OF POWER IN THE PRESENCE
OF PERIL (10:19, 20)

19. But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak.
20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.

D. PERSECUTION BY THEIR OWN FAMILIES
(10:21, 22)

21. And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child: and children shall rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death.
22. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

E. PRUDENCE IN PERSECUTION (10:23)

23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

F. THE SUFFERING OF THE SAVIOR AND
HIS SERVANTS (10:24, 25)

24. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his Lord.
25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his Lord.

G. FREEDOM FROM FEAR (10:26-31)

1. BECAUSE OF THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH
26. Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known.
27. What I tell you in the darkness, speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the house-tops.

2. BECAUSE OF THE RIGHT REVERENCE

28. And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

3. BECAUSE OF THE CARE OF THE CREATOR

29. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father;
30. but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
31. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Show the harmony between the passages which command us to fear God and those which say "there is no fear in love" and others which say that the fearful will be condemned.
- b. Why do you think Jesus is being so painfully honest with His disciples as He describes the pain and difficulty they will face?
- c. In what way are the disciples like "sheep in the midst of wolves"?
- d. What is so "wise" about "serpents"?
- e. How are Christians supposed to be harmless?
- f. Do you think that the mentality of fear that Jesus is instilling in His Apostles is healthy? He warns His Apostles about the untrustworthiness of people (10:17). But is this good?
- g. What is the proper balance between this wariness of people and that invincible optimism that Jesus obviously and personally practiced?
- h. Would you say that the person who walks the tightrope between distrust of people and seeking to encourage the best in people is the most mature person? Do you see anything in Jesus' words that verifies or denies or otherwise modifies your conclusion?
- i. What was so important about the Apostles' standing before governors and kings, as Jesus says, "for a testimony to them and the Gentiles"? What kind of testimony do you think Jesus has in mind?
- j. How could these disciples avoid the nagging anxiety that could easily plague and drown their ministry in worry?
- k. How long do you think Jesus expected His disciples to endure these difficulties? What motivations does He provide them which would actually enable them to do this?
- l. What is the difference between cowardice, i.e. that moral unwillingness to take a stand for Jesus when the going is

- impossible and there is more temptation to be silent, on the one hand, and prudence, i.e. the wisdom to "flee to the next city"?
- m. What motivations does Jesus give His disciples to keep them from watering down His message for fear of what men would say?
 - n. What is so important about the promise of leadership by the Holy Spirit? What difference would this make when the disciples were haled before courts to give witness about Jesus?
 - o. What hint does Jesus give in this text that, although He had confined their sphere of their mission to Israel, yet the disciples' testimony would not long be limited to Jews only?
 - p. Do you think the promise of inspiration that Jesus gave in this commission applies to the Apostles only, to all preachers and witnesses for Christ, or only to those facing imprisonment and martyrdom? On what basis do you decide this?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Here I am sending you out like so many sheep surrounded by a mad wolf pack! So be sharp—keen, on your toes, yet not cunning, dishonest or shrewd. Be on your guard against people, for they will hand you over to be tried before Sanhedrins, and to be whipped in their synagogues. You will also be dragged into the presence of Roman governors and Herodian princes because of your allegiance to me. But this will but give you opportunity to testify before them and the Gentile world. Take that opportunity!

"When they arrest you, DO NOT WORRY how you are to talk or what to say at your trial, because the right words will come to you at the right time. This is because it will not be you speaking, but rather your Father's Holy Spirit will be speaking through you.

"Brother will betray brother to have him executed. Even fathers will betray their own children. Children will turn on their own parents and send them to their death. You will be universally hated because of your allegiance to me. But the man that hangs on till it is all over will be saved.

"When they start persecuting you in one town, take refuge in the next one on down the road! I can tell you this: you will see a clear demonstration of my vindicated authority before you have com-

pletely covered all the towns here in Palestine. This demonstration of my majesty may be described as my coming in glory.

"Remember: a student does not rank above his teacher any more than a servant is above his master. The student should be content to share his teacher's lot or a servant his master's. If they have called me, the Master of the house, names like "Beelzebul, Prince of Evil or Satan" and the like, what kind of names do you think they are going to call you?

So **DO NOT BE AFRAID** of them who threaten you, because, like every other previously hidden secret, the Gospel too is sure to be revealed, so deliver your message without any reserve. Even any secret compromises you make to save your life will be found out too! So, all that I have taught you in private sessions and in evening seminars under the stars, broadcast in broad daylight! Proclaim my message on a public, nationwide scale.

DO NOT GET EXCITED about those who can only kill your body but cannot touch your soul! No, have an infinitely greater reverence for God, because He is the one who has the right and ability to punish both you and your body in hell!

"What is the going price on sparrows? Two for a penny? Yet, not a single sparrow hits the ground without your Father's knowing about it! To put it another way: God knows the most detailed facts about you, like how many hairs you have on your head. So **DO NOT BE AFRAID**. You are of infinitely greater value to God than any number of sparrows."

SUMMARY

Jesus lays before His Apostles the dangers that they will face serving in His ministry. They are not to fear anybody or anything, but get Jesus' message proclaimed at all costs. Persecution by the State, the State Church or by their own families is not to deter them. Nothing is to stop them: they are to keep going, fearlessly proclaiming Jesus' Word on a nationwide scale. They have no reason to fear men, since they serve the living God whose personal care and love for them is far greater reward than all earthly blessings. They are to regard all persecution, not as a failure of their ministry, but an extension of it into areas otherwise untouched and unreachable.

NOTES

In harmony with the presupposition suggested in the introduction to this chapter, regarding the various time elements supposedly in-

tended by the three-fold division into which Matthew orders his material, the following section will be interpreted in reference to that period of the Apostles' mission which began roughly at Pentecost and terminated with the end of the Jewish nation as such. Hence, in this section we will find more direct applications to the life of the early Church than were to be discovered in the partition of the text just concluded. At this point a concurrent study of the *Acts* would be most helpful in providing illustration after illustration of the very thing Jesus is here predicting.

A. A GENERAL WARNING (10:16)

10:16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Who, knowing the risks and dangers to which he is sending his men, could demand of them such unflinching loyalty and rigid discipline? Many great commanders have so ordered their troops under similar conditions, commanding them to stand and face materially superior forces, though they themselves have improper or inadequate weapons. But Jesus is sending His finest disciples into the face of moral evil and spiritual, wicked powers. These humble followers are armed only with truth embodied in frail, human clay. This is why the Master places their Apostleship on the basis of a personal mandate from Jesus Himself. "I Myself send you forth." (emphatic *egō*) A man can be made to do almost anything when he knows for whom he suffers. So, throughout this passage Jesus continues to reiterate this personal relationship with the King Himself for whom they serve and suffer. (Stop and read verses 16, 22, 24, 25, 27, 32, 33, 34-38, 39, 40, 42, in order to appreciate this.) If we miss this emphasis put here by the Lord Himself we shall fail to sense the strong personal element not only in the obedience of the Apostles to Jesus' orders. We may also be incapable of seeing, in our own service to Him, that His slightest wish is our strongest command. With this understanding, we will see that the smallest item of our lives—from the reason why we brush our teeth and how we go about it, to the way we treat our fellows in driving down a crowded street during the afternoon rush hour—is just an expression of this kind of personal service to Jesus.

I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. One point to notice about this simile is that Jesus is not sending the Apostles, as it were, sheep into a howling wolfpack, for **sheep in the midst of wolves** is already one complete concept. Jesus used **in** (*en*), not **into** (*eis*). This whole picture, as well as the text in which it is found, is a vivid sketch of the very opposition which already

had begun to surround Jesus' own ministry and had been aroused by it. He is saying, "You are already sheep surrounded by wolves, but I am sending you out anyway!" (Cf. 10:24, 25) Jesus Himself had already stood, or would soon stand, in each place He now pictures to His men. He, the Lamb of God, know what it meant to be surrounded and ultimately torn to pieces by these wolves! He also knew that, if He Himself should be butchered by the wolves, His Apostles, the tender lambs that they were (Cf. Lk. 10:3), could not but expect similar or worse treatment. **Sheep:** what a figure of relative helplessness, in no respect vicious like the attackers. But, in the nature of the case, because of the Gospel they must preach and because of the humble, godly character that must be theirs, these men **MUST** be lambs. They could not, indeed they must not, escape the viciousness of the wolves by trying to be anything but lambs.

The **wolves** Jesus faced were not, for the most part, the slum-dwellers, the rackets men, the street walkers or other segments of the "common rabble," but the polished men of the cloth, the pious leaders of organized religion, the theologians. In fact, it was not the common people that engineered His crucifixion, but these latter. (See Jn. 19:11) Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knew the wolves and refused to run from them (Jn. 10:12), is willing to risk the very existence of His little flock by a frontal attack: sheep versus wolves! Though the term **wolves** is often used with particular force to describe false teachers who try to draw away followers from Jesus (Mt. 7:15; Ac. 20:29), this term might be stretched to include those specific illustrations Jesus provides in the verses that immediately follow: religious rulers (10:17); pagans (10:18); unbelieving families (10:21); all people generally (10:22). This is not surprising, since the attitudes of all but the first mentioned, are but the reflection of the unrelenting bigotry and bitter opposition instigated by the religious leaders. Many were the times during the ministries of the Apostles Peter and Paul, as we learn of those labors in *Acts*, when, as they were making surprisingly rapid progress in their Gospel proclamation in a town, jealous Jews stirred up hostility to the Lord's messengers among the otherwise friendly or neutral populace.

This picture of **sheep in the midst of wolves** reminds us of that continual condition in which the Church has always found herself. Luke, when he set down the sermon preached at the time of the commissioning of the Twelve (Lk. 6:12-17, 20-49), reports this most timely warning: beware of those moments of dead calm, when you face no opposition: "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so

their fathers did to the false prophets." (Lk. 6:26) Jesus knows that the "hatred and inimity of fossilized orthodoxy," as Barclay puts it so beautifully (*Matthew*, I, 386), will be so intense and so protracted that, if at any time the sheep are anything but sheep, or the wolves look more sheepish, His people will have already begun to compromise their fundamental nature. Of course, it is important to remember here that Jesus does not say that the wolves will always be the religious establishment, since He actually gives several different illustrations of "wolves at work" in this larger context. In other societies this nexus is not necessarily so obvious or even so real. However, the **wolves**, i.e. those embittered, violent enemies of the flock, may be found in varying groups with varying intensity, and it takes real insight sometimes to distinguish real wolves from just plain sheep that hold a view antagonistic to our own! It is much too easy to identify the **wolves** in what is merely different from ourselves, or in what is only a secondary manifestation of the real evil with which we ought to concern ourselves. This demand for wisdom is the purpose and point of the concomitant advice which necessarily comes next.

Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

This is Jesus' counsel in view of the treacherousness of the natural enemies of the disciples. **Wise as serpents.** Skill in sensing and avoiding danger seems to be the characteristic of snakes to which the Lord alludes here. But why is this characteristic so essential? Immediate martyrdom was not to be the goal of Jesus' servants: their business was to give witness to the exceedingly precious message they carried. An early martyr's death is never preferable to a life of labor to spread the good news and strengthen the saints. (Cf. Notes on 10:23; Phil. 1: 19-26; also Paul's clever division of the Sanhedrin against itself, Ac. 23:1-9) Here the emphasis is on discretion, even astuteness in the sense of sagaciousness. What a contrast between this recommendation Jesus makes and that fanatical thirst for martyrdom found in those who, burning for distinction, unwisely and unnecessarily exposed themselves to dangers. He says that His servant must not deliberately invite trouble or court danger, if he may honorably and conscientiously avoid it.

Harmless as doves. The word **harmless**, as a translation of *akéraiōi*, leads away from the intention of that word, since the etymology of *akéraiōs* is not that suggested by Thayer and adopted in the ASV, i.e. *a-* negative + *keráia* or *kéras*, a horn = "hornless," literally; figuratively, "harmless." (See *ISBE*, 2798) The derivation seems rather to be *a-* negative + the stem of *kerámmi*, "to mix" = "unmixed;"

figuratively, "simple, guileless, sincere, unadulterated, uncontaminated, pure, innocent." (*ISBE*, 2798; Arndt-Gingrich, 29; see also Ro. 16:19; Phil. 2:15) So, while "harmless" is not a good translation of the word involved, it is not altogether harmful to the sense, seeing that it does express a resultant, if not a connotative, meaning of the Greek word. The Apostles, if they are to respect Jesus' demand that they be guileless, will not seek to revenge themselves or retaliate against their persecutors or those who refuse their message. However this is a secondary application to the principle intent to the word, as indicated above. In what sense must the Apostles be "sincere, innocent, pure, guileless"?

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 91) takes it that "being blameless, they would encounter no **merited** severity." Their methods of self-defense must never be such as to deserve censure, not must any of their attitudes betray an un-Christian spirit that provokes sentence against them. (Cf. Lk. 9:51-55; contrast Peter's defense, Ac. 4:8)
2. Though the Apostles are to be constantly surrounded by and exposed to evil, they are not to tempt themselves to use evil methods to protect themselves. Even though they must be extremely wary of treacherous men, yet they themselves must not resort to subterfuges and stratagems, but carry out their work with boldness and perfect honesty, even though this latter course may expose them ultimately to suffering. This is clearly implied in later verses. But "guilelessness is not a synonym of gullibility." (*ISBE*, 2798) It is, rather, the unwillingness to deceive even persecutors. Any disciple should learn the difference between telling the truth in all of his spoken words, on the one hand, and telling all he knows, on the other. Only a fool would babble on all that is in his mind, especially when in the presence of persecutors he blurts out particular information that would bring certain harm to innocent people. Any Christian may admit to knowing certain truth that would involve the life or safety of others, while withholding its content from inquisitors upon pain of death or the most horrible tortures. We are permitted to suffer for Jesus' sake by "laying our lives down for the brethren" (I Jn. 3:16). But we are NOT permitted to tell a lie merely to achieve a good purpose, i.e. save human lives.

While the two animal characteristics, i.e. a serpent's wisdom and a dove's innocence, may seem like a strange combination, yet, taken

together, they represent a perfect, balanced relation. Bruce (*Training*, 112,113) sketches that balance:

Amid such dangers two virtues are specially needful—caution and fidelity: the one that God's servants may not be cut off prematurely or unnecessarily; the other, that while they live, they may really do God's work and fight for the truth . . . Conscientious men are apt to be rash, and prudent men are apt to be unfaithful. Yet the combination (i.e., of caution and fidelity) is not impossible, else it would not be required . . . For it was just the importance of cultivating the apparently incompatible virtues of caution and fidelity that Jesus meant to teach by this remarkable proverb-precept . . . The dove must come before the serpent in our esteem, and in the development of our character. This order is observable in the history of all true disciples. They begin with spotless sincerity; and after being betrayed by a generous enthusiasm into some acts of rashness, they learn betimes the serpent's virtues. If we invert the order, as too many do, and begin by being prudent and judicious to admiration, the effect will be that the higher value will not only be postponed, but sacrificed. The dove will be devoured by the serpent: the cause of truth and righteousness will be betrayed out of a base regard to self-preservation and worldly advantage.

Or, to say it another way: "Be wary, but not crafty; simple, but not simpletons." Fraser (*PHC*, 252) suggests rightly that

the Lord Jesus is the consummate example to illustrate His own teaching. He was always on His guard, and penetrated all the maneuvers and plots of those who watched and hated Him. He fell into none of their snares; never lost self-possession; never spoke at random; uttered all His words and conducted all His intercourse with infinite discretion. But He formed no counterplots and devised no stratagems. No craft was in His bosom; no guile was in His mouth . . .

Ironically, though the disciples are forbidden to "fight fire with fire" (of the same sort), or to "pay back the enemy in his own coin," i.e. not use those methods for succeeding that worldly people have ever thought absolutely essential to the successful outcome of their plans, yet the outcome of THIS conflict is pre-announced: The Kingdom of God will go to the sheep, not to the wolves! (Cf. Lk. 12:32) Sheep that are convinced of this ultimate victory, regardless of all the inter-

mediate difficulties and "momentary afflictions" (2 Co. 4:17), can never really fear the wolves.

But how is this admonition (10:16) to be harmonized with the declaration of Paul: "Love believes all things"? (2 Co. 13:7) At what point were the disciples to stop giving the benefit of the doubt to the treacherous enemies of Jesus and the Church, and start fleeing, or, perhaps, refusing to reveal their plans in order to save the lives of the members of the Church? It is not always possible to see the enemies' affirmations in the best light or always to put the best construction on their conduct. How long should "love believe all things," before it becomes gullible and, consequently, an enemy to itself? How long should Christians give the benefit of the doubt to those who seem to be reasonable men, but whose present intellectual stance holds them to a course of rejection or opposition to the Christians and their message, before the disciples are to decide that such men are not to be trusted any longer but have actually become a menace to the body of believers and an obstacle to the further proclamation of the Gospel? Two answers arise out of the varying circumstances in which the disciples find themselves:

1. In the days of the first commission, love would demand that the disciples remain in a city to proclaim the glad news of the Kingdom of God, build a nucleus of believers until opposition to their activities becomes so effective as to render ineffective the Apostles' ministry. In this latter case, they were prudently to move on. (10:23)
2. However, when the universal hatred of the Christian movement becomes so general (10:22) as to render impossible or fruitless further flight, or when flight itself is impossible, then love demands that the disciple stand and suffer for the name of Christ where he is.

The answer to this dilemma, then, is to be found in the actions and attitudes of the "wolves" themselves. (Cf. Mt. 7:15,16) While the Christians are to be optimistic that even "wolves" CAN be converted, yet they must always be aware that they MIGHT never be. They must "believe all things" are possible for good in the life of potential or actual enemies (remember Saul of Tarsus!), but this trust must never betray them into handing over all their plans to the enemy. Bruce's summary (*Training*, 113) is very much to the point:

Do not be so simple as to imagine all men good, honest, fair, tolerant. Remember there are wolves in the world—men full of malice, falsehood and unscrupulousness, capable of invent-

ing the most atrocious charges against you, and of supporting them by the most unblushing mendacity. Keep out of their clutches if you can; and when you fall into their hands, expect neither candour, justice, nor generosity. But how are such men to be answered? Must craft be met with craft, lies with lies? No, here is the place for the simplicity of the dove. Cunning and craft boot not at such an hour; safety lies in trusting to Heaven's guidance, and telling the truth. (Mt. 10:19, 20)

The following admonition sharpens this wariness.

B. PERSECUTION BY THE STATE CHURCH (10:17)

10:17 But beware of men; for they will deliver you to councils and in their synagogues they will scourge you. Beware of men: what a shock to those believers who might have been inclined to suppose that the rightness of their message, the goodness of their lives, their own innocence as beginning teachers and their wonderful miracles, would automatically gain for them the good will of all men. Nevertheless, the ability to be both "wise and guileless" requires that the Apostles remain on their guard. This does not mean, of course, that the Apostles will escape harm simply by being alert, for they will ultimately suffer, regardless of all their dexterity and alertness. It is just a question of time and who can hold out the longest, the Apostles or the persecutors. Jesus, therefore, intends His men to be forewarned, hence, forearmed, against the treachery of such unscrupulous men. This way, they would be able to avoid the needless difficulties with such men by guarding themselves against thoughtless, provocative remarks that would inflame them.

Beware of men is not intended to arm us with a general distrust of humanity in general, even though it is with sinners, rebels against the living God and our Christ, that we have to do. However, this admonition does indicate that not all men are to be trusted with the same confidence, since they are capable of destroying all that the Christians seek to create. (Cf. Jn. 2:24, 25) Paradoxically, while the Christian is to seek what is honorable in the sight of all men (Ro. 12:17; 2 Co. 8:21) and what pleases his neighbor for his good (Ro. 15:2) and is to try to do good to all men (I Th. 5:15), yet he cannot trust every man, nor must he compromise his message in order to reach these other goals. Jesus knew that if the Apostles were going out with the view to pleasing men so as to make their program succeed, they would be strongly tempted to water down their message or be so discouraged as to give it up altogether. In the end they would

fail to hit the specific targets Jesus planned for them. Now the Master explains in what specific areas the Apostles are to be particularly wary.

For they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you. The first member of this parallelism seems to suggest that the **men** of whom the Apostles are to beware are common men, whether in high offices or not, who, because of religious prejudices, political convenience or other motives, betray the Jewish Christians into the hands of the religious authorities. **Councils . . . synagogues** are two words that underline the fundamentally Jewish character of the persecutions that Jesus now describes, since civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction were so thoroughly blended in Judaism. (Cf. Mt. 23:34) Edersheim (*Sketches*, 91; see also *Life*, II, 553ff) informs us:

Every town had its Sanhedrin, consisting of 23 members if the place numbered at least 120 men, or of 3 members if the population were smaller. These Sanhedrists were appointed directly by the supreme authority, or Great Sanhedrin, "the council," at Jerusalem, which consisted of 71 members. It is difficult to fix the limits of the actual power wielded by these Sanhedrins in criminal cases . . . Of course all ecclesiastical and strictly Jewish causes and all religious questions were within their special cognizance.

As will be noted in the following verse, even the appearance before pagan rulers was, during the early years of Christianity, a Jewish question instigated by Jews, who, enflamed against the Christians, haled them before the Gentiles. This Jewish character of the difficulties gives peculiar force to the time limitations of this section, dating its end approximately with the end of the Jewish power to persecute the Church. The time limits are also seen from another angle, that of the fulfilment of Jesus' words in the life of the early Church. (Ac. 3; 4; 5:17-42; 6-8—8:4; 22:19; 26:11; "scourging" in 2 Co. 11:24) Morgan (*Matthew*, 103ff) reminds us:

A very remarkable fact of history throws light upon this: never from the day of Jerusalem's fall until now has a Christian believer been scourged in a Jewish synagogue . . . There have been other eras of persecution of the Church, but never from the day in which Jerusalem fell has there been a systematic persecution of Christians by Jews . . .

The reestablishment of the Jewish state of Israel in the modern world obsoletes many older views of the Jewish condition, Jerusalem, after

1900 years, by force of Israeli arms is now in the hands of the physical descendants of Abraham. How this fact should be evaluated in modern eschatology is yet to be seen. But this later development must never obscure this obvious: 1900 years are still 1900 years in which the Jews have not had it in their power to deliver up Jewish Christians to the punishments of the Jewish courts until now non-existent. Given the present condition of Israel, this very state of affairs could, of course, begin tomorrow morning.

C. PERSECUTION BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT (10:18)

10:18 **Yea and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.** The Gentile character of these potentates is reflected in the fact that puppet-kings and procurators who governed Palestine were but men appointed by the authority of Rome, as well as the fact that the arraignment of the Lord's representatives before these dignitaries should result in testimony also to the nations. The Apostles were not to regard their low birth or limited cultural opportunities in such a moment, as if they had something to be ashamed of. There were to stand in the presence of those temporary rulers in the name of the King of Kings whose they were and whom they served. They were to think only of the joy of being able at last to bear witness to the message of Christ before such influential men (Cf. Mk. 13:9; Lk. 21:13) They were to see these **governors and kings** as MEN to preach to, not tyrants to fear. (Study the excellent examples of Apostles before their rulers: Ac. 24:10-17; 25:6—26:30; 27:24; Phil. 1:12, 13; 2 Tim. 4:16, 17)

For a testimony to them (*eis martyrion autois*). The Gospel is primarily and fundamentally a message of facts that actually occurred to which eyewitness testimony bears record. Only secondarily is it a philosophy, a world-view or an ethical system. What one thinks about the facts placed before him must determine what he will do with the theology or the ethics or the view of the world that is also connected with the Christian message. The primary job of the Apostles was to testify to what they had seen and heard. (Cf. Lk. 24:47, 48; Jn. 20:30, 31; Ac. 1:8, 22; 2:22, 32; 4:20; 5:32; 10:39-42; 22:15, 18, 20) What a significant testimony that must have been! Whether it were greater than ordinary preaching may be debated, but this presentation of the central facts of the Gospel before such dignitaries could not but demand of these prominent citizens of the Empire that they investigate the entire cause of Christianity, that they set

down in the archives for all history to remember what transpired under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate. If the rulers rejected the preaching however, the Apostles' witness becomes witness against them before God.

For a testimony . . . to the Gentiles. Here is proof, early in Jesus' ministry, of the ultimate universality of His Gospel, even though He had ordered His men to preach only to Jews at first. This hint is amply clarified and enforced by the Great Commission which revoked some of the limitations in this first mission of the Twelve in a limited area and people (Cf. Mt. 24:14; Mk. 13:30) The nations too must hear the evidence! But the evidence was not all verbal: Jesus said, "For my sake you will be taken before governors and kings, for a witness to them and to the nations." The very act of being brought into court **for Jesus' sake** was in itself evident proof that these witnesses believed something very deeply. Jesus is saying, "Your lives must tell for something! If you men get arrested and are accused of being my disciples, would there be sufficient proof to condemn you?" The force of one's life as testimony itself cannot be overemphasized. The very fact that the Apostles grasped their Lord's meaning and chose rather to suffer trials, imprisonment and death, rather than change or surrender their testimony, proves in itself to be convincing proof of the honesty of the men themselves. It also renders a favorable verdict about the probability of the veracity of the facts they declared.

Notice how concerned Jesus is that men have testimony borne to them! (Cf. Mt. 8:4; 24:14) He wants every one to have a chance, even though, as the true "Knower of the hearts," He is fully convinced that, of all those who do have a chance offered them, only an infinitesimal percent will actually accept it.

Before governors and kings. Nothing could seem more improbable to political observers and the man on the street than that these simple fishermen, publicans and tent-makers would someday stand in the presence of emperors and kings of the mighty Roman Empire stretching from India to Brittainia! Or that on such an occasion these simply Galilean teachers would present a defense of the very Gospel that would soon shake that empire at its very foundations and overthrow it. (Dan. 2:44) But Jesus not only predicted it, but also gave detailed instructions how to act when it occurred. In this simple, unobtrusive way, Jesus identifies Himself as a true Prophet of the most fantastic accuracy!

NOTE: Here again Matthew records words of Jesus similar to warnings that Mark (13:9) and Luke (21:12, 13) set down in connection with that period preceding the end of the Jewish nation and Jerusalem. This fact seems to point to the certainty of the suggestion made earlier that the time schedule within this prophecy concerning the mission of the Twelve began with their first public witnessing for Jesus on Pentecost and ended with the destruction of the Jews' power to persecute.

D. PROMISE OF POWER IN THE HOUR OF PERIL (10:19, 20)

If the general warnings just mentioned are clear illustrations of what Jesus meant by "Be as wise as serpents," then what follows may well explain what He meant by being "innocent, or guileless, as doves." But having impressed upon His men the importance of the testimony they must bear before governors and kings, Jesus now forestalls a disturbed reaction in their minds that this declaration foreseeably could produce. How understandable it would be for them to reflect: "Well, if our witness before those great men is so important both to them and others, as well as to ourselves, then how desperately important it is that we make that testimony the best witness we can!" Though this conclusion would be perfectly natural, Jesus reveals to them that it is not the correct deduction, for they must understand that the success of their witness does not depend upon their own frail powers, as if, in such a critical moment, they would be left alone to their own devices.

10:19 But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. 20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.

The complete absence of duplicity or conniving on the part of the Apostles could not be more heavily emphasized than Jesus does so here. The disciples are positively forbidden to spend anxious hours planning the form and content of the legal defense. **But when they deliver you up . . .** rather assumes now that this betrayal is a foregone conclusion for the Christians. It also teaches two other truths: it indicates most obviously the moment when the Christians would feel the deepest anxiety as they fear both inadequacy of their own endurance under trial as well as the possible failure to express the testimony of Christ in its proper perspective. This is why Jesus, long years before that moment arrived for any of His followers, takes the sting out of the dread of that hour. He says, "When your time

comes to be haled before the magistrates, do not worry a minute about what defense you are going to make or how you must make it! That is an order!" A second truth comes out of this zeroing in on a point of time yet in the future: Jesus forbids anxiety in that moment when on trial, but in no way does He suggest that they may not prepare themselves well years before that crisis before the court.

It may be objected that preparation *per se* is forbidden, since the Master provides the antithesis to anxiety by specifically promising immediate inspiration. This valid objection, however, regards only one specific type of preparation, i.e. that anxiety vividly described by Lenski (*Matthew*, 400):

To be arrested and haled before judges low or high is enough to upset anyone. In addition to the shame, the fear and other conflicting emotions, the trial itself and the matter of their defense would cause the apostles terrible anxiety. They would, however, not merely be concerned that they might defend themselves and escape the infliction of penalties, their anxiety would be chiefly concerned with the honor of Christ and the gospel, and they would fear that because of their mental confusion, mistakes, weakness, ignorance or other handicaps they might injure the Lord's cause. After a sleepless night or more in a foul cell, with no advocate at their side, in what condition would they be to do justice to the gospel?

It is precisely these preoccupations that are discouraged. But the objection against that preparation that depends upon the leadership of the Spirit is not at all prohibited.

Jesus knows that if the Christians begin to take time out of their preaching to plan legal defense, they will do themselves untold psychological damage as well as put their own cause in doubt. So many uncertainties like what questions would be put to them, the unforeseen turns their trial could take, the personality of their accusers and of the judges, etc., could not be foreseen with any confidence. So they had no objective way of preparing for them. They must, instead, spend their time in preaching. Jesus knows that positive proclamation will accomplish more psychologically with the audience than would self-defense. Further, this confidence that the right answers will be provided when the Apostles are haled into court, frees their minds psychologically to keep busy at the one major task to which they were to give themselves completely: the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. But, at precisely this point, something

takes place that forms the finest kind of preparation for those fearful moments. In the normal proclamation of the Gospel, two separate, natural phenomena occur. By constant use of the supernatural revelations, inspired in them by God's Spirit here promised, their answers would become second nature to them. The same is true of their own reflections upon the message revealed over the years: out of these meditations would come the most convincing arguments that could be used to present Jesus' message in its most reasonable form. Out of their broad experience in preaching, they would make the Gospel so much a part of themselves that they could not but express in those critical moments what had been the transforming power of their whole previous Christian life.

But again it may be objected: Jesus did NOT here mention any such natural reflection and absorption of the Christian message so that it would become second nature with the Christians brought before the judges. Rather, He promised immediate inspiration. True; He does do this for very good reasons:

1. Because in the case of some Apostles and early Christians, there was not time available for such reflection from the beginning of their own personal testimony until they were attacked, tried and executed. The success of His program did not so much depend upon their maturity as upon the accuracy of the witness under His direct inspiration.
2. Because of the fact that they must learn to depend upon God for the revelation at the right moment, not upon their own wisdom, talents, courage or faith. It might be safe here to say that, had the Apostles dreamed that the success of their testimony should have depended upon the ripeness of their own understanding of the message, they might well have dedicated themselves to monastic reflection or theological research, rather than to preaching and revealing.
3. Further, Jesus could not very well put much emphasis upon this natural, habitual acquisition of the best presentation of the Gospel, since, before it developed, the Apostles themselves could gain little comfort from hoping for it. For them, it lay yet in the misty future.

So, Jesus devaluated this side of the Apostles' growth altogether, assuring them that God would supernaturally provide His message—both form and content—in the critical moments.

Then, why bring up this natural maturing from the life of the Christians, if it is not immediately apparent in the text? But that

it is in the text is obvious from Jesus' negation: "**It is not you that speak, but the Spirit.**" This is a Hebraistic expression absolutely stated for what we would express in a relative idiom: "It is not you alone who speak, but also the Spirit." The Apostles certainly would do the talking, but their thoughts would be directed by God's Spirit. There is, then, a **you that speak**, i.e. the Apostles who would have achieved a certain level of spiritual growth and power. but it is essential that Jesus deny this merely human power used in their testimony and defense, since they certainly, as normal human beings, would be tempted to depend upon whatever human resources were then available. Normal maturity is inserted here in order to point out a side of the Apostles that Jesus could certainly see, although He was not free to bring it into the question here, due to the natural anxieties of the men in their present state of preparation. It is a temptation to think of these noble followers as mere human radios who were tuned into God's wave-length and mechanically received and rebroadcast God's Word. But they were not mere instruments, but MEN, whom God inspired. This natural maturing is mentioned here also by way of application to modern Christians. As men like us, the Apostles must submit themselves to, and grow up into, their own supernaturally inspired message. Revelation received, whether by direct inspiration or indirectly by searching the Scriptures and reflecting thereupon, does not guarantee, nor instantly produce, maturity, sanctity or the memory fund of experience. (Witness Peter's *misapprehension of the absolute universality of the Gospel*, even though it were he who first revealed it by inspiration, Ac. 2:39. It took special revelations and several particularly surprising experiences before he was convinced of it, although he had lived with his own gospel for several years, Ac. 10 and Gal. 2.) By identifying ourselves with the Apostles as men, we see how to derive comfort from this same instruction:

1. Our confidence that the Apostles' word is the Word of God, because it is a message revealed to and through them by this special inspiration of the Spirit, leads us to stake our lives, honor and eternal happiness on what these men say.
2. Then, our reflection upon that message, our constant preaching and practice of it gives us a fund of memory and experience that touches our lives so deeply that when we find ourselves in the same crises or trials, our dependence will not be upon our wisdom, our talents, our faith or our courage, but upon His word in us. It should not be at all

surprising that a particular circumstance should call up from our learning of the Scripture a word or a wisdom that so well fits the situation that our enemies cannot withstand the spirit with which we speak.

As all good writers and speakers, artists and musicians know, purely natural "inspiration" cannot take place nor produce great art without great "perspiration," i.e. without that real discipline that prepares the artist to produce his "inspired" masterpieces. So also here, the modern Christian, without benefit of the special gifts of the Spirit, must take the time and submit to the discipline of learning the Word for himself and of teaching it constantly to others, so that it may become so much a part of himself that, in critical situations where the testimony he gives is especially crucial, it is God's Word that is presented. The important question to us is: how much of the Word is really, intentionally and systematically hid up in our hearts so that it can really inspire us to truly great preaching and teaching?

For it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. Contextually and logically, **in that hour** would seem to limit the inspiration here promised to those moments when the Apostles stood trial. But the very reason Jesus adduces for their not needing to be anxious (10:20) may be taken as an independent idea, not at all circumscribed by this phrase. **10:20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.** The intentional use of the present participles (*ou gar humeis este boi lalountes alla to pneuma . . . to laloun*) leads us to look for an inspiration of the Spirit that was continually speaking through the Apostles throughout their ministry, and not merely when they stood trial. The force of Jesus' argument, when seen from this angle, becomes even stronger, for, if God's Spirit could inspire the Apostles when they stood before the tribunal, He could certainly be able to guide them infallibly to accomplish far greater tasks at other times, as, for instance, preparing the written Gospel for all nations and times. The Lord inserts this statement as the reason why the men must not be upset about their defense, as well as to explain just how their answers would be provided them at the right moment. But this reason actually covers more circumstances than that just mentioned, i.e. the trial. Jesus' argument is this: "Since the Holy Spirit will be speaking through you throughout your ministry, do not be anxious for those few moments during your service to me when you must stand before the rulers of synagogues or governors of the Empire.

The Spirit who has provided all your power up to that moment will certainly not forsake you then! He will speak through you just as much on that occasion as on any other."

The basis of this interpretation is found, of course, in other instruction of Jesus on the same subject that covers the same general period of the Apostles' ministry. (Jn. 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14, etc.) But these passages, that contain information given during the last week of Jesus' ministry prior to the cross, refer to the post-Pentecost guidance of the Spirit. This latter fact lends additional strength to the opinion that, in this section (10:16-23), Jesus is dealing primarily with the labors of the Apostles following His own ascension and prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state, a period in which the special activity of the Holy Spirit was especially marked in the normal life of the Church. Jesus Himself is fully able personally to inspire His messengers to preach His Gospel, perform His miracles and perfect His program, without a direct baptism of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Spirit was not yet given (Jn. 7:38, 39), although the Apostles, and later the Seventy (Lk. 10:9, 17-20), had served Jesus in the capacity of instruments through whom He carried out His miraculous ministry. The Spirit's special service began only after Jesus left the earth to return to the Father. (Jn. 16:7, 13) This is why it may be concluded that Jesus is not discussing here the Apostles' immediate, short-term mission in Jewish territory, but rather their later, world-wide mission to all.

While this promise of power was made here specifically to the Twelve, Jesus gave the Apostles to understand that this special aid was not only their special prerogative, since on other occasions He said the same thing to His disciples in the presence of the multitudes. (Lk. 12:11, 12) In the fulfilment of Jesus' promise in the life of the early Church, Stephen, while not an Apostle, yet under the obvious control of the Spirit, shows how Jesus meant this promise to be understood. (Ac. 6:3, 5, 8, 10; 7:55). While there was no doubt about the unique position and official stature of the Apostles among the orthodox Christians (excluding thus the few detractors of the Apostles here and there), yet these same Christians were to recognize the diversity of the manifestations of the same Spirit. (I Co. 12:4-11, 28-30; Ro. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-11) So it would not be surprising to find other Christians, besides the Apostles, speaking by direct inspiration both when under trial and on other occasions as well. In fact, this seems to have been the specific purpose of the laying on of the Apostles' hands, that others might

also be granted special gifts of the Spirit. (Cf. Ac. 8:15-17; 19:6; 2 Ti. 1:6) Presumably, when the Apostles passed from the scene, there would have been no others who could receive this special inspiration, since there is no evidence that anyone but an Apostle could convey such gifts by the imposition of hands. The likelihood that this is the case is rendered even stronger by the formation and diffusion of that body of writings recognized as Scripture, a phenomenon which rendered fundamentally unnecessary the special or sporadic, inspired revelations.

Something significant has come into existence since Jesus pronounced these promises of direct, immediate inspiration by the Holy Spirit: the New Testament. This book is unique in all the world, because it is the personal work and message of the Holy Spirit rendered available to all in a concrete and easily usable form. This book is the personal responsibility of the same Spirit that Jesus sent to reveal His will in permanent form for all ages of the Church. While only the early Christians, especially the Apostles and some of their companions, like Mark, Luke, James and Jude, received that promise of inspiration and participated in its fulfilment by setting down in written form what the Spirit willed, the servant of Jesus today can pour over those pages until its message becomes the heart and vitality of his life. As a natural consequence, the modern Christian can also have a share in the victorious witnessing under fire that those early Christians knew, the only difference being that the early pioneers depended upon an immediate inspiration to reveal God's Word, whereas the modern saints depend upon God's revealed Word to provide immediate inspiration. It should be obvious here that the early Christians depended upon a supernatural phenomenon, while the strength of the modern disciple is more natural, arising as it does out of memory and reflection upon the word revealed once for all. This does not rule out the possibility that the Spirit today should take advantage of our previous study, memorizing and reflection of the Word and sharpen our powers of recall at critical moments. But this is another subject. The point here is that the Apostles must trust, not in themselves to defend themselves, nor even in their God-given, natural powers in those fearful moments, but in the immediate guidance by God's Spirit in them, speaking through them. Would to God that we had the same confidence in the eternal Word of the Holy Spirit so that we depended completely upon it not only for the needed wisdom to respond to our detractors or

accusers, but also for the choice of ideas and words that would help lead our fellows to know the living God!

The evidential value of the declarations made in this short section is obvious. Without once affirming his own obvious authority, Matthew reports this promise of Jesus that the Apostles would be divinely empowered to recall and reveal divine truth. By so doing, Matthew categorically claims his own inspiration, but since the claim is deeply imbedded in the history of Jesus' acts and pronouncements, this becomes the most convincing sort of affirmation that could be made.

E. PERSECUTION BY THEIR OWN FAMILIES (10:21, 22)

10:21 And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child: and children shall rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. Until now Jesus has been discussing harassment by the unbelieving Jews, trials before the Jewish and pagan rulers and other similar difficulties. But now He bares the ugly reality: "For many of my disciples, my service will mean martyrdom!" The surprisingly rapid and successful spread of Christianity is often allowed to obscure those many heart-breaking trials in hundreds of Jewish homes, as one or more of its members took the crucial step to accept Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. Only the Lord Himself knows how many harsh, bitter arguments were offered to recall those members of a family, that were leaving the good, old, tried-and-true ways of Moses to serve an unrecognized, itinerate Rabbi executed on a stake outside Jerusalem! As it probably seemed to those who remained bound to Judaism, those who left to follow Jesus Christ were embarking on an uncharted sea, leaving the security of the rich ceremonies of the worship of Jaweh to seek eternal joy at the hands of One whose very message denied nearly all that the rabbis had ever thought or taught about the Kingdom of God. How many families were literally shredded by the simple confession: "I believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ the Son of the living God?" How many were the moral (if not actually literal) funerals at which a son, a grandmother, a daughter-in-law, a wife or husband or others, was considered thenceforth and forever dead? For how many Christians was it lamented: "It were better for him that he had never been born"?

But this is not merely a question of a family's excommunication of one of its members. This is nothing less than denunciation before the courts by bringing the case before the law in the clear understanding that the charge, if proved, must lead to a verdict of guilty and the death sentence. The most heart-breaking part comes when

the brother, after having betrayed his own kin into the hands of those who would kill them, gives the fatal testimony that seals their doom.

Here Jesus puts the old proverb to the test: "Blood is thicker than water" (=Kinship is more binding, more important than baptism specifically, and, in general, worthy of more consideration than the tenets of one's belief.) This old piece of calculating human prudence is based on the general observation that the bonds which unite families are generally so durable that one could hardly think that differences of belief in religion could cause brothers and sisters, parents and children to sever these tenderest of relations. And, were there no proof to the contrary, we could hardly believe that this actually had been ever considered. Nevertheless, Jesus not only knows the human heart but He also prepares His disciples to face the realities He finds there. Nor would this malignant opposition arise only in the breasts of the vilest men most practiced in wickedness, but more especially in the hearts of the sincerest of men, who in their zeal for God, thought themselves doing Him service by destroying the disciples of Jesus! (Cf. Jn. 16:1-3; Ac. 26:9-11; 23:1; I Ti. 1:13) What consummate blindness, what depth of conviction, what partisan bigotry, what inhuman opposition to rupture the dearest human ties and to be willing to hand over one's own kinsfolk or friends to torture and death!

It is important to recall that these same words are repeated by both Mark (13:12) and Luke (21:16) in connection with the end of the Jewish nation, but are deliberately omitted by Matthew at that point in his own account of the same discourse (Mt. 24). This fact harmonizes further with the suggestion that this section (10:16-23) describes the Apostles' mission from the beginning of their work alone (in His absence) until the fall of Judaea.

10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. Surprisingly enough, this very declaration measures the emotional as well as the moral distance between the non-Christian world and the Christians. Nowadays this very sentence, once intended to mark the distance between Jesus' people and the world's crowd, becomes the very standard by which one may judge how far the Church has shifted from her original heroic uniqueness to her present posture of compromise with the world! At the same time, this phrase proves how far wrong are those philosophers who would find in Jesus' message and program "only the perfection of those forms of thought already known to the ancient world." Jesus' Kingdom

stood out in stark contrast to the ideals of the then-current Judaism (although in perfect harmony with the then-ignored principles preached by the OT prophets) and the morals actually practiced by the non-Jewish world. Though the non-Christian world was badly splintered over many issues, it was to find itself united in its opposition to Christianity. No, Christianity did not find its origins, its divine message or its faith to live by in the garbage heaps of Rome, Athens or Jerusalem! Power, philosophy and religious law united in the endeavor to strangle the life out of Christianity. **Ye shall be hated by all men** is almost perfectly echoed in Tacitus' (*Annal.* XV. 44) famous description of the reason for the persecution of the Church: *odio generis humani*, of which Tacitus' words are the ironic opposite. Men hated Christians because Christians, supposedly, hated mankind! (See Newman, *Manual*, 148-150; Schaff, *History*, II, 85-104; Qualben, *History*, 57-60) Why?

1. Christians recognized an authority higher than the State, and in the event of conflict between the law of the State and that of God, they chose to obey God rather than men. This, in an era when the existing world-view held the State to be the highest good.
2. Christianity was a *religio illicita* because it was viewed as a religion introducing rites the character of which were unknown, or, at least, unrecognized by the State, whose society could be regulated by the laws of the Senate. It was looked upon as a secret society, hence came under the condemnation of such societies in general.
3. Christian morals contradicted the pleasure-mad philosophy of men of the world in general. Because they refused to live like other people, sharing the same selfish goals in life, they were regarded with suspicion as haters of all that is great, fair and noble in humanity.
4. Christians were charged with atheism and superstition, since they had no impressive external religion and rejected all other expressions of religion (temples, priesthood, altars, sacrifices, etc.) other than their worship offered only to the invisible Christ. Their intolerance of other religions was also unacceptable.
5. Christians were chargeable with high treason for their refusal to worship the Emperor.
6. Christians taught a religion that was truly universal without a national basis or barrier, that was destructive to social

classes and fundamentally inimical to slavery, by exalting and honoring useful work by all classes.

7. Christians worked miracles, a fact that could be misconstrued for magic, a serious offense.
8. Christians conflicted with the material interests of the makers and merchants of idols, sellers of sacrificial animals and the priests of the pagan rites.
9. Christians held more or less secret meetings during the persecutions, a fact which easily gave rise to rumors that Christians practiced abominable immorality and cannibalism.

Bruce (*Training*, 113) makes this biting comment:

The ignorant, superstitious populace, filled with prejudice and passion, and instigated by designing men, play the part of obstructives to the cause of truth, mobbing, mocking and assaulting the messengers of God.

Even at times when the Gentile population would have been inclined to welcome the Gospel preached by the Christian missionaries, zealous men, moved by jealousy for their business (cf. Ac. 13:6-12; 16:16-22; 19:23-41) or for their religion (cf. Ac. 13:45-50; 14:1-6, 19; 17:4-8, 13), deliberately incite to violent action the clots of unthinking, unquestioning people here and there by the use of a few catch phrases or shouted slogans packed with emotion.

For my name's sake (See on 5:10-12, Vol. I) This practically universal hatred shall arise *dià tò ònoma mou*. (Cf. Lk. 6:22; Jn. 15:18-21.) This means more than that the mere mention of the word "Jesus" will ignite all the vile bitterness and unrelenting hostility foreseen here. **For my name's sake** means: "You will be execrated for all that I stand for and am." This includes, of course, Jesus' message, its proclamation by which His name became known, and Jesus' Church for she bears His name before the world. (Cf. Ac. 3:16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18; 5:41, 42; 8:12; 9:20, 21, 27; 26:9-11) Note again here the extremely personal cause to which Jesus calls and challenges His men to suffer. (See on 10:16)

Again, it is interesting to see that all three Synoptists set down this very declaration in Christ's great prophetic discourse. (Mt. 24:9; Mk. 13:13; Lk. 21:17) This is significant because Matthew, who is sometimes accused of taking liberties with Jesus' words, arranging them somewhat capriciously as the mood strikes him, also records this concise notice in BOTH chapters 10 and 24. From a human point of view, it is difficult to see how this fact could be thought to

have escaped his notice, if he ever reread what he wrote before releasing it for publication. His inspiration lends divine authority to this repetition, assuring us thus that Jesus actually said this on the two separate occasions. The point of noticing the repetition here is that it assures us that we are on the right tract in finding correspondence between this section (10:16-23) and the general description of Jewish national affairs from 30 A.D. circa until A.D. 70 circa. For, while it is true that Jesus could easily use similar language to describe two widely separated, totally unconnected events, we may be justified in understanding Him as describing the same general period or the same events on various occasions, unless He Himself clarifies our confusion by pointing out the difference, which, it seems, He does not. (See notes on Mt. 24.)

But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. The major thrust of this verse is "Do not grow weary of trusting in Me." The details, however, are a bit stickier to explain, for the major term to interpret is **the end**. To what **end** does Jesus refer? **the end** of what? Several possibilities come to the surface:

1. **The end**, coming indefinitely as it does to us in this text, might seem here to be left intentionally indefinite, a possibility that would allow the words to refer as well to one's death as to the second coming of Christ at the end of the world, or perhaps also to the end of the Jewish nation. This indefiniteness has the certain advantage of keeping the disciple on his toes spiritually, since he could never have known for certain in those days when any one of these three ends should take place.
 - a. But since the coming of Christ and the end of the world would be an event having little consequence beyond the psychological stimulation of preparation for an event about the time of which one must necessarily be uncertain, it would not seem as likely that Jesus would put this particular event forward as of primary interest and importance.
 - b. Death, of course, would be the particular end of the individual and, at the same time, be an event which would seal his destiny. Elsewhere (Rev. 2:10) Jesus makes this explicit. While the mention of death is assuredly in the immediate context (10:21) and is an **end** whose date is uncertain enough to require patient endurance on the part of any Christian at any time, but does this exhaust

Jesus' meaning when we compare this expression with other pronouncements He made on the subject?

2. But when this passage is placed along side Jesus' great prophetic discourse (Mt. 24; Mk. 13:9-13; Lk. 21:12-19), it becomes clear that **the end** may have had a closer reference to the judgment then coming upon the Jewish nation. If so, then the application of the exhortation is to remain faithful to Jesus during that period of Jewish persecution which came to an end, never to be repeated after the total defeat of the Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem.

It may be helpful to note these similarities:

Mt. 10:22, 23

and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

But he who endures to the end will be saved.

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel,

before the Son of man comes.

Besides the obvious parallels in words at certain points, there are intriguing parallels of thought at others. (See special study on the Coming of the Son of Man.)

Those who remained patient to the end of the Jewish persecutions and of the nation of Israel could say, "By the grace of God, we have remained faithful this long: we can go even further! We have already held on faithfully to Jesus, beyond what we thought even possible. But the end of the world is not yet. So we have learned to remain loyal even to the judgment or to our death, which ever comes first!" But there is an unyielding warning lying just below this promise: "He who quits before the end, will be lost!" (See on 10:32, 33).

Mt. 24:9b-14

9b and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

10 And then many will fall away

11 and betray one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And

12 because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold.

13 But he who endures to the end will be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations.

And then the end will come.

This matter is so personal that Jesus uses the emphatic demonstrative pronoun *hoistos*: "The man who holds on till the end, this man (and no other) will be saved." (Cf. Heb. 10:36-39)

F. PRUDENCE IN PERSECUTION (10:23)

10:23 **But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.** Here is a summary application of the principle: "Be wise as serpents; harmless as doves." The disciples must be alert to dangers hidden in any situation that might bring disaster to the cause they promoted, but, at the same time, they must not become involved in witch hunting, i.e. smelling dangers where there are none. **Ye shall not have gone through . . .** indicates that their first target must always be Gospel proclamation. (See below) Bruce (*Training*, 113) summarizes this:

How, then, are the subjects of this ill-treatment to act? . . .
by avoiding the storm of popular ill-will when it arises . . .
and by giving the utmost publicity to their message though
conscious of the risk they run.

The principle thrust of this verse is: "Keep moving, in order to keep preaching as long as you have the opportunity. You do not have to give up your life to the first persecutor that comes along. Go to another town: be elsewhere when they come to take you. I will come, so if you must fear at all, fear that your mission will not be completed in time." Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees would harrass the Christians from town to town. (Mt. 23:34b) Since there are so many cities and villages, not only in Palestine but in the world, that need the Gospel, towns where people would give a joyful hearing and an obedient reception, it would be an unwise expenditure of lives and effort to continue in an area where persecution rendered it impossible to continue preaching the Gospel effectively or where people rejected it by continually ignoring the messengers.

Before this idea is seized upon to justify ignoring certain countries of the modern world where Gospel proclamation is either illegal, due to a majority heathen religion (as, in Islamic nations) or practically impossible, due to a denominational Christian State Church (as in Catholic or Protestant countries where small evangelical free churches are hindered for one reason or another), let us remember the

context. Jesus urges this advice in view of a definite terminus to their actual opportunity to evangelize. This juncture is believed to be the end of the Jewish nation. (See Special Study on the Coming of the Son of Man.) If this be correct, the absolute application of this principle of flight in the face of persecution is no longer necessary, since we have already passed the boundary marker that staked off that time period. We have entered rather into that era in which we Christians must patiently stay put, despite the hindrances or handicaps under which we must labor. Naturally, we must seek the very best possible means to communicate the truth of the Gospel in each situation. For example, great economic, social and political revolutions are afoot in Italy that can drastically change the climate within which the Gospel is preached in what is usually thought of as a 100% monolithic Catholic system. But the Churches that have kept hammering at the problem of evangelizing in Italy since World War II have both gotten a foothold in the country from which to move with these revolutions as they take place, as well as a thorough working knowledge of which methods function best in reaching this people. It has historically taken that time to perfect the materials, develop the leaders, prepare the groundwork, become aware of each other's efforts, etc. Had the brethren closed up shop and fled at the harsh persecutions faced in the early years, the free churches in Italy today would not be in their present posture of strength and readiness.

Jesus' advice to flee in the face of persecution is to be interpreted within the contextual time limits He set for it: "till the Son of man be come." After that event, presumably, the requirement that they flee would be no longer relevant.

Flee to the next. This command may sound like cowardice until the Lord's principle is understood. In the same way that banks, knowing the value of human life and realizing that their trained personnel is difficult to replace, give the general advice to surrender the money in the event of a robbery, and in the same way flyers are encouraged to ditch a million-dollar airplane that cannot be safely flown back to base, in order to have the even more valuable life of the trained aviator, so the Master puts a high value on the lives of His men: "When it is possible to flee without compromising your commitment to me or my message, save your lives to fight another day!" But even in this section Jesus takes for granted that

there would come a day when flight would be impossible and apprehension by the authorities inevitable. (vv. 17, 18)

Study the following examples of fleeing before persecution, or of going on to other cities after being refused in a city: Ac. 8:1b, 3, 4; 9:23-26, 29, 30; 11:19; 12:17-19; 13:44-51; 14:5-7, 19, 20; 17:10, 14, 15; 22:17-21.

Here are some examples of remaining firm in the face of persecutors: Ac. 4:23-33; 5:17-42; 6:8—7:60; 8:1b "except the Apostles!" 12:2, 3; 18:1-18; 20:22-25; 21:4, 12-14.

There is real wisdom in knowing when to escape and when to stand and die. However, the decision may not be as complicated as it might seem, since the rule for the early Christians was: "If you can leave, do so; if not, give faithful witness." Therefore, they were not to flee in terror for their lives, but out of determination not to be hindered from delivering Jesus' message to the largest number of people possible.

There is no fanatical enthusiasm or hysteria here! Christian witness is valuable! The longer it is maintained, the more effective and helpful it can be to all. (Cf. Phil. 1:19-26) A dead Christian cannot evangelize, cannot comfort others as well as a living one. Lives are not to be thrown away; death is not to be courted. No self-appointed martyrs allowed here! This is not cowardice, just good sense. No one could accuse Jesus of encouraging His men to be faint-hearted milksops, after taking seriously the bracing demands of cold courage and unyielding commitment stated elsewhere in this same discourse!

You shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. Three major terms in this text must be explained: **gone through**; **the cities of Israel** and **the Son of man be come**. The difficulties arise from the fact that each of the three terms are interlocked, complicating the interpretation, since each must be understood not only for itself, but in relationship to the other two. The result must be a whole, with no pieces left over. Notice:

1. **Gone through** has been explained as referring to:
 - a. Using all the cities of Israel as a refuge from persecutors who menace them from town to town in Palestine.
 - b. Reaching all the cities of Israel, whether in flight or by deliberate choice, to work in them by bringing the Gospel to them. This interpretation is preferable both on the

basis of the meaning of the word used (*telésēte*, "to bring to an end; finish or complete," Arndt-Gingrich, 818) and in light of the Apostles' commission to evangelize. This view has the advantage also of including most of the sense of the other one.

2. **The cities of Israel.** In whatever sense Jesus' coming is to be understood, this geographical limitation is important. He is to come to these **cities**, not to the world in general. Thus, **Israel**, as a nation with its cities, would still have corporate existence. **Israel** here may even be intended in the same sense used earlier (10:5-15) to refer to Palestine, not Samaria nor Gentile territory. From this it is clear that the term **cities of Israel** does not allude to those areas in Gentile country where Jews eventually would be found living throughout the world.

The fact that Jesus mentions here **the cities of Israel** should not be taken to mean that these were the only cities being evangelized by the Apostles during the period now alluded to, since in the same section the Master has already pointed out that this period would be characterized also by "testimony before (governors and kings) and the Gentiles" as well. So He is no longer speaking of that mission on which the Twelve were to preach to Jews only. (Cf. Mt. 10:5, 6) This is rather a time when the Apostles would be evangelizing the nations, Israel included. With regard especially to Israel, says Jesus, you will not have terminated your work in this land during your world evangelization, until your time of opportunity will be brought to an end by my coming.

3. **Till the Son of man be come.** Four interpretations have been offered:
 - a. Does Jesus mean that they cannot possibly have fled throughout the entire length of Palestine, before Jesus Himself comes preaching through those same cities? If so, He would be viewed as coming to their rescue when in trouble, or coming to recall them in from their labors to rest. This view, chosen by Foster (*SLC*, 1965, 35), presumes that "their task was so great and so urgent that they were commanded not to weigh themselves down

with any extra equipment; they were to go with all effective speed . . . Like the "seventy," the twelve were sent before Jesus to announce His coming and to prepare the various cities to receive Him (see Luke 10:1-16)." This view is, of course, based on the supposition that every detail of the discourse in Matthew 10 is to be applied with (relatively) equal force to the first mission of the Twelve in Galilee, a standpoint at least problematic, if not indefensible in light of the factors mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. For, while it is certainly believed here that this entire discourse was delivered prior to, and in preparation for, that first limited mission, it does not follow that every detail of the discourse is to be applied to that first mission. Many of the details, of which this verse (10:23) is one, have relevance to later missions. This view has the handicap of failing to explain the relatively certain absence of serious persecutions during that early mission of the Twelve which would have driven them from city to city only to be rescued by Jesus' personal coming to the particular Galilean town in which they were then endeavoring to work.

- b. Or did Jesus intend that the missionary of the Church would not be finished before the return of Christ at the end of the world? However, how could this exhortation be relevant to the immediate needs of the Apostles, since He has not yet returned in this sense? Would this tactic ("persecuted in one city, flee to the next") be at all applicable to the present age of the Church, or for that matter, to ANY age of the Church from the end of the Jewish nation until Jesus' return?
- c. Or does Jesus refer to the establishment of the Church on Pentecost as the significant "coming" here? This seems unlikely, inasmuch as the Apostles' movements, just ahead of the persecutors, were intended to render possible the thorough evangelization of Palestine, a fact which would more likely be connected with their post-Pentecost activities. However, it is true that other missions did intervene between the early mission of the Twelve and Pentecost (Cf. Lk. 10) which would turn this specific warning into a general order for observance by the Apostles

and other workers during any mission. However, the other characteristics of the period described in this second section of Jesus' discourse (10:16-23) do not match what we know of the pre-Pentecost missions of the disciples. This latter observation would tend to eliminate a pre-Pentecost application of the Apostles' fleeing and, consequently, a Pentecost application of Jesus' appearance. (See the Special Study on the Coming of the Son of Man, for further discussion of the Pentecost problem.)

- d. Or does He mean that some great manifestation of His glory would soon take place before they have the opportunity to evangelize all of Palestine and/or flee through all the cities thereof? If we identify the coming of the Son of man with the retributive justice meted out on Jerusalem and Palestine, then Jesus' final victory over Judaism with the fall of Jerusalem would actually take place before the Apostles could have covered all the cities of Jewish Palestine with the Gospel message. (See the Special Study for the reasons for this identification.) This declaration, so understood, becomes a precise prophecy having remarkable fulfilment in the uncertain times which were characterized by many hindrances to effective, continuous evangelism and which were caused by the rebellions that precipitated the Jewish War. This, in turn, culminated in the fall of the Jewish State.

If this latter interpretation be accepted, Jesus' urgent demand means that the Apostles had only one generation in which to work freely among the Jews in Palestine, i.e. that forty-year period from Pentecost until the Jewish War. To Jesus, every soul was equally precious, so if one hamlet would not accept the message, perhaps another would. Consequently, every moment was precious. Time was not to be lost, trying to convince those who would not be convinced, when there were others who would be.

While these words refer specifically to the ministry of the Apostles, yet there is a real truth about Christian service, hidden just below the surface. When that great hour arrived for the coming of the Son of man, the Apostles would not have reached all the cities of Israel. Their work would be cut short and left largely unfinished. Vaughn (*PHC*, 253) suggests this implication:

Our Lord thus ministers to our necessities by warning us against several mistakes which are apt to spoil and ruin true

work. One of these is the demand beforehand for a roundness and completeness of defined duty, which is not often to be found, and which must certainly not be waited for. The life and work, and the Christ-work of which this text tells, are never finished. . . . A deeper reason lies in the nature of the work. The most real work of all is the intangible, impalpable thing which we call influence. Influence is the thing which Christ looks for, and it is an indefinite, and so, an interminable thing.

G. THE SUFFERING OF THE SAVIOR AND HIS SERVANTS (10:24, 25)

Here Jesus seems to begin another major section of His discourse. (See Introduction of Chapter 10, where the outline is discussed.) In order to feel the general nature of this passage, as opposed to specific instructions "for Apostles only," notice the terminology by which He describes the people for whom these exhortations are intended: "disciple" (v. 24); "slave" (v. 24); "those of His household" (v. 25); "every one" "whoever" (vv. 32, 33); "he who" (vv. 37-39); "you" (Apostles, v. 40); "prophet" (v. 41); "righteous man" (v. 41); "one of these little ones, a disciple" (42). But these general expressions do not at all exclude the Apostles, for what Apostles was not all of these and more? There is no such thing as an Apostle who was first a disciple of the Lord, but there certainly are many disciples who never were Apostles. In this section the Master addresses all those disciples who would have a part of His ministry from that day forward until He comes again. There is considerably less emphasis on the strictly apostolic ministry here and more attention is given to the entire work of the Church.

Having mentioned some of the great hazards these followers must risk, Jesus proceeds to provide them adequate motives for enduring them (vv. 24-33). The first of these motives is: "I your Master and Teacher have endured; you too can make it!"

10:24 A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord. Lenski (*Matthew*, 406) thinks "this double statement is axiomatic, so self-evident as to need no proof." But we may ask ourselves why the Lord would say the obvious. He begins with what all could admit as true, in order to carry His listeners to see what emotionally they would not be so ready to admit, but what intellectually they must grasp as certainly true. But why begin with THESE two varied illustrations: what have they in common?

1. The **disciple** is identified with his **teacher** by his own choice.
2. The **slave** is identified with his **lord** by his master's choice, his master's purchase, hence he renders service because he is his master's property.

The slave here (*doúlos*) is not merely a servant who renders service for a wage. So it actually takes both illustrations to describe our unique relation to Jesus. We are not simply and only his **disciples** to discuss with Him His views, His program, and then decide what parts of it are not acceptable to our growing minds, or are, in our view, inadequate or unnecessary. Rather, we are also His **slaves** to do His bidding, and since our service to Him is self-chosen, we have also chosen not to question His word.

But in what sense is it true that Jesus' follower is **not above his teacher . . . (nor) above his lord?**

1. Some think this verse has something to do with how high a student can rise. They see Jesus as affirming that the best thing that can happen to a disciple is to tread in his professor's footsteps, learn his mentality, his approach to the search for knowledge, learn his truth. This is an idea certainly taught in similar language elsewhere, however from the negative side applied to disciples who trust ignorant authorities. (Cf. Lk. 6:39, 40; see my comments on Mt. 7:4, Vol. 1, 402) While it is true that this can happen in regard to the student, was there ever hope that this be also true in the parallel case of the **slave** and **his lord**, i.e., was there much hope for a slave to rise to the level even of his master? If not, the discussion, then, is not centered upon the accomplishments of the student, but upon his being better off than his superior.
2. It is better to take this expression in the sense that no inferior is too good to escape the destiny of his superior. Whatever was good enough for the Lord and Master is good enough for the servant-disciple. If it was not below the dignity of the Lord to humble himself to serve ungrateful men, suffer their abuse and ultimately die for them, it surely should not be considered below the dignity of His servant to do the same. (Cf. Jn. 13:14-16; 15:20)

This latter seems to be the better interpretive translation of **not above** (*ouk . . . hypér*): "no better than." The implication is that Jesus'

disciples are not to think of themselves as exempt from any of the obligations to render service in Jesus' spirit of humility or immune to the same persecutions the Lord Himself must suffer. But is it not even possible to harmonize the two interpretations above and consider both as inherently possible in the text? Consider the following:

The main point of these two parallel illustrations is that all subordinates in a given situation generally undergo the same destiny, for good or ill, as their superiors. If the **teacher's** doctrine is brilliant and true, his students who followed him will be led into the same glorious truth in which the **teacher** himself lived. If, on the other hand, the teacher's premises are false, all his students who remain faithful to him, will plunge with him into intellectual gloom. Either way, they owe what they are to him and share his destiny (so long as they follow him, of course). If a **lord** makes wise decisions that raise the honor and wealth of his house to greatness all his lowliest slaves will be privileged to share in his glory, since they are a part of his house. Contrarily, if he suffers for his bad leadership and unwise decisions, all his house declines with him. Thus, the hopes of the disciples are literally bound to the destiny of Jesus! If these alternatives were in Jesus' mind, then they become instant tests of the disciples' confidence in Him, since He warns them of what will certainly seem to them like an impending tragedy. Important people were already calling Jesus dirty names ("Beelzebul") and with seeming impunity, which, if left unchecked, could proceed further, bringing Him into extremely dangerous collision with the highest religious authorities in Israel. These fears of the disciples were certainly justified, but Jesus here must inform them that theirs would be the same fate.

10:25 **It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher, and the servant as his lord.** But in what sense must the disciple-servant **be as** his superior? To disciples, blind with materialistic messianic hopes, these words may have had a positive, hopeful ring, since they wanted above all else to share Jesus' future. (Cf. Mt. 20:20-28)

1. Their most optimistic view of their own chance for glory could not include being as glorious as their Lord, even though they would hope to be put in positions of authority and honor from the very first. But to the Lord who pronounced them, these words contained a succinct warning that envisions the suffering and dying of His faithful disciples for their convictions about Him.

2. Or, if we eliminate the negative, unworthy elements in the disciples' hopes, we see the disciples identified with ("be as") their Lord in their service for Him. Morgan (*Matthew*, 108) puts it:

The King teaches us that, in all our service for Him, He reckons us as identified with Himself, as going in His place . . . He is above us; but His teaching is to make us become as He is, and all He is, is ours in this matter of service. . . . The bond-servant, bound to obey, because the property of the King, is yet as he goes forth, identified with His Lord, with his Lord's royalty, his Lord's dignity, his Lord's authority, delegated by the king to speak for the King, in the name and nature and power of the King.

This is not absolute equality with the Lord and Master, for the very terms which describe the followers, i.e. **slave** and **disciple**, preclude this. But this identification with Jesus is not mistaken. (Cf. Mt. 10:40)

3. But this realization, that there were to be moments when the disciples would **be as** their Master and Lord, means that this proposition of Jesus is also reversible: the Master and Lord shall fare no better than His own people. What a shock to the Apostles themselves to hear Jesus say: "After all, I have said to you about your sufferings, remember: the Teacher is not above His disciples at this point either!" If you are to suffer for the cause of righteousness, how much more will I, who am its chief proponent!" Jesus was going to receive the same treatment that He here pictures for His men. What comfort these words would bring to these men in later years as they themselves underwent difficult days of hindrances, frustrating imprisonments, harrassment and death! They would stay steady under fire, remembering, "Our Lord Himself has passed this way too: by His grace we too shall stand!"

Jesus' emphasis in this section is upon the identification of His disciples with Him in His suffering, even though their identification with Him through their service in His name is a necessary corollary. If men would not accept the doctrine of Jesus, for whatever reason: misunderstanding, ignorance, deceit, conceit, prejudice, moral opposition or whatever, the disciples must expect no different experience. If it would

appear that Jesus has not been able to get His instruction across to some people, the disciples who are teaching the same truth to the same kind of mind will face the same problems.

Wisely Jesus informs His men ahead of time what they may certainly expect. So doing, He removes the element of shock for the Apostles themselves, since the rude surprise of this evidence of men's rejection of their teaching might tempt them to use the tremendous supernatural power at their disposal in ways unworthy of the Lord who give it to them. (Cf. Lk. 9:51-55) Rather than retaliate, they must learn to continue patiently seeking the redemption of those who might yet be saved. (See on 5:11, 12, 44) By giving Himself as the chief example (see below on *Beelzebul*). Jesus renders His men more capable of dealing with this vicious abuse, since they will have seen their Lord Himself under fire.

Against what frame of mind was Jesus' warning directed? As the disciples thought of their inability and the greatness of the task He sends them forth to accomplish, they must have trembled. Jesus had mentioned the unrelenting hostile powers that would mobilize against them. Now He fortifies them for that onslaught: "Yes, you will be facing difficulties beyond description, but always keep in mind that this is but the necessary outcome of your identification with me." (Ro. 8:29)

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household! To reinforce His meaning, the Lord reminds the disciples of a shocking example that they had already heard and were yet to hear with increasing intensity even before Jesus died: **Beelzebub!** (Cf. 9:34; 12:24; Jn. 7:20; 8:48) According to the better manuscripts, this dirty name is not "Beelzebub," but "Beelzebul." Edersheim (*Life*, I, 648) sees a vivid pun in Hebrew here, which, of course, is lost in Greek and its translation, a pun which would carry both the ready wit of Jesus in His being able to combine memorable word combinations as well as give His disciples a taste of the harsh treatment they could expect. Edersheim points out that Beel-Zebbul means in Rabbinic language "Master of the Temple" but sounds so much like Beel-Sibbul which means, figuratively, "lord of idolatrous sacrificing," or, literally "lord of the manure pile," that one can immediately catch the biting sarcasm when used in reference to Jesus. If Edersheim is right, or even near it, this crude humor of the scribes would have cut to the heart those who loved Jesus and would be anguished at this reference

to their Lord. I still remember vividly the angry tears of a dear friend when he first read a certain theologian's blasphemous suggestion that Jesus might be the bastard son of a German soldier. While this was a splendid reaction for one whose heart is bound up in Jesus, yet the disciples of the Lord must learn to steel themselves against this kind of brutal misrepresentation, lest they be so deeply shocked or offended by it or take it so seriously that they dismiss their mission as hopeless or give up their discipleship altogether. Whether the specific word be **Beelzebul** or any other blasphemous epithet that intentionally misrepresents everything Jesus stands for or is, some of the sting has already been removed from it by the Lord Himself. He proved He could face such hostility against Himself and despise the shame of the cross and endure it. (Heb. 12:1-4) To the alert disciple, this vicious abuse heaped on the disciple himself becomes the clearly outlined path where the Master has already walked! (Cf. I Pet. 2:19-25)

There is another practical application of the text in the immediate situation of those early Christians: this abusive name-calling becomes the pre-attack warning signal that alerts them to the need for planning their flight to the next city. (10:23)

How much more them of his household? It is as if Jesus had said, "If our enemies have been a bit reticent about attacking me directly, out of fear of divine retaliation, they will hardly have this same fear of you and will the more readily slander you. In fact, when they will have begun to see that we do not use the terrible, destructive powers at our disposal in our own self-defense, they will grow bolder and bolder in their attacks. You may not have it so good as I—and they will crucify me!" In none of this does Jesus outline a plan for retaliation against those who slander, harass or kill His men. He leaves them no alternative but that of accepting the suffering or else of playing the traitor to His cause. Although He guarantees them ultimate victory, yet there is no rancor or retaliation. He demands that they leave it to the judgment of eternity to rectify the injustices of time, the praise of God to silence the slanders of men. It takes a long view and a grand faith to believe Jesus and see God's eternity as more real than time, in order to keep asking oneself, under the ever-present din of men's taunts, why bother to answer these men who before long will be forever silenced? (Cf. I Pe. 4:12-19)

His household we are! (Heb. 3:6; 1 Jn. 3:1-3) What a glorious privilege to belong to such a royal house! We belong to it,

but before we will have enjoyed the privileges of so noble a connection, we will have paid dearly for it. As Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 395) preaches,

When Christianity costs something, we are closer than we ever were to the fellowship of Jesus Christ; and if we know the fellowship of His sufferings, we shall also know the power of His resurrection.

(Cf. also Phil. 3:8-16; 1 Pet. 3:9-18; 4:1, 2, 12-19)

H. FREEDOM FROM FEAR (10:26-31)

1. THE TRIUMPH OF TRUTH (10:26, 27)

10:26 **Fear them not therefore.** But why did Jesus say **therefore**? While this is normally a good translation of *oûn*, does it have this meaning here? If Jesus is making an inference from the preceding material, what are the premises? Two solutions are possible:

1. The actual reasons behind the inferential use of *oûn* (= **therefore**) are not stated in the text, hence must be supplied by the reader. If so, in light of the immediately foregoing context we might suggest something like the following: "You, my disciples, will be treated much worse than me. What is to be your response as my disciples, my servants? This relationship precludes your doubting my provision and care. Therefore, do not fear them!"
2. Dana and Mantey (*Manual Grammar*, 256-258) suggest a slightly adversative use made of *oûn*, in the sense of *however*, which would function admirably here to solve our problem. Accordingly, the sense would be: "You, my disciples will be treated much worse than me. However, do not fear them!" (See also Arndt-Gingrich, 597 on *oûn*.)

With good reason Jesus hammers on this theme throughout this discourse (vv. 26, 28, 31), even as He had emphasized earlier the needlessness of anxiety under trial (v. 19). The Lord has depicted ugly days ahead for those who follow Him and minister in His service and most of the opposition they must meet will come from men who will stop at nothing to hinder their witness. It is absolutely essential for Jesus to continue to drum on this theme: "DO NOT FEAR!" Why? If fear is caused by uncertainty, and uncertainty is caused by disbelief of what Jesus has revealed, then fear is sin! Jesus will not have any disciple be uncertain about anything He has declared. Cer-

tainty that God will do and provide all that Jesus promises is the absolute answer to fear. Fear betrays this lack of trust. (Cf. Heb. 10:32-39; 13:5, 6) Though these early Christians would have many reasons to react negatively to opposition raised to their labors, they must never allow their opponents to become bigger than God. But it is not enough just to say to people who have good reason to fear: "Do not be afraid!" There must be reasons, good ones, that can really allay their fears. The first reason the Master offers is His own personal guarantee of the triumph of truth.

For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

This Hebrew parallelism states in two parallel phrases essentially the same observation: truth will out! This is one of the hardest, most concrete maxims in the universe and is worthy of stating in proverbial form, since it has many applications. (Cf. Mk. 4:22; Lk. 8:17; 12:2) Truth is the way things are, not as people tell it nor as they wish it to be. Any philosophy, or view of life, that refuses to admit the true nature of things as they are, can only break itself upon the rocks of this reality. Truth will triumph. Jesus guarantees this by stating categorically that no amount of ignorance or hiding one's eyes can impede truth's ultimate conquest and complete vindication.

This realization immediately puts to test the disciples' trust in Jesus to be telling the truth. Jesus does not mean merely the truth of the assertions He had just made about the dark, bloody future ahead of them, but He may also mean the truth of all of His message. This He lays on the line, "I am willing to place my whole revelation in this framework. If I have been deceiving you, this fact too cannot be hidden. It too will be discovered. But in the meantime, you have enough evidence to decide whether my message comes from God or not, whether it is ultimate truth or not."

What is there about men that Christians are not to fear? This depends partly on what we think Jesus meant by what is **covered that must be revealed, hidden that must be made known.**

1. Is it their secret, unscrupulous plans whereby they plot against the disciples?
 - a. Is Jesus promising a sort of divine counter-espionage that provides the people of God with information regarding the movements of the enemy? (Cf. 2 Kgs. 6:8-19) But the question arises whether Jesus refers to the discovery of enemy plots to destroy the disciples and whether the revelation of the malicious plotting would be made known

during this life and not rather later at the judgment. (However, see Ac. 23:12-22; 9:23-25, 29, 30) Another doubt about this view is seen in the Hebraistic parallelism formed by verses 26, 27, in which the latter identifies more clearly, if not absolutely, what was "covered . . . hid" in the former.

- b. Is Jesus guaranteeing the total vindication of His servants, if not in this life, certainly in the next? (Cf. Rev. 2:9) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 92) suggests:

Disciples often suffer from injustice that is so covered up from the eyes of the world as to appear like justice, and there is nothing more disheartening than this. But Jesus assures them that no hidden or covered up iniquity shall escape exposure . . .

Here again is a test of their discipleship: can they ignore the harsh words, the sneers, the insinuations, the scoffing, the unreasonableness, the threats of reprisals, the loss of all the profit or advantages by which they must earn their living, in order to remain loyal to Jesus? Can they commit their lives (and all that sustains it) to Him who judges justly? (I Pet. 2:23; 4:19) If so, He is saying, "You will get justice, not in this life necessarily, but before God. That is the only important tribunal to take into serious consideration, no matter how painful or unjust may be men's punishments."

2. Or, in line with the foregoing context, there is another **hidden** thing that will ultimately be disclosed: the secret fears of Jesus' followers themselves. This is the fear which takes all the fight out of them, that turns them into self-justifying cowards unable to face danger or death. This too will one day be discovered! (See on 10:32, 33) Not only is this rationalizing cowardice wickedness, since it justifies denying Jesus in practical ways by refusing to take a stand for Him when that stand must be taken, but it involves an unexcusable hypocrisy. It is hypocrisy, because the disciples know that Jesus is supreme Lord, but they who give in to their fears, acts as if their tormentors are much more. But this self-excusing pretense is useless and senseless therefore and wicked, for one day God will mercilessly expose it. (Cf. Lk. 12:1-9)
3. Are the disciples afraid that their inability, in view of the

tremendous task before them, will cause them to fail to succeed in proclaiming the Gospel?

- a. There was much of the Gospel that Jesus could scarcely reveal even to His chosen Twelve, due to their spiritual immaturity and their strong prejudices against the foundational principles of His Kingdom. (Cf. "the mysteries, or secrets, of the Kingdom of heaven" Mt. 13:10-17; 16:20; 17:9) They had hardly grasped the reality of His deity or the character of the Throne He was to establish, nor could they understand the necessity for His death for the world's sins. (Cf. Mt. 16:21-23; 17:22, 23; Lk. 18:31-34) After these mighty facts were established and evaluated, the Apostles could understand and broadcast the full message in all of its power. But now, before the fact—at least two years before Calvary, the Resurrection and Pentecost—the disciples, from a human point of view, could not but doubt their own ability to make this glorious message known; especially since there was much in it that they themselves did not comprehend.
- b. Jesus argues: "My present revelation of the Kingdom, that I challenge you to preach, will be misunderstood and misinterpreted and thus remain hidden to the majority of people to whom we all preach. But this is no motive for giving up! Sooner or later this very message we struggle to make real in the lives of those who hear us will come to light. It HAS to! The very secrets of God's Kingdom that you will try to make men see, will not be any better understood when you proclaim them than when I say the same thing. But this is no reason to give up preaching. The truth will triumph!"

So, out of this indefinitely applied proverb come three admonitions: Do not fear therefore that the proclamation of the Gospel shall fail, or that the enemies of the Gospel shall succeed, or that your own cowardice can remain hidden! What a motive for enduring: Jesus is in full control of all the unknowns in our ministry! He says, "Do not fear the opposition, even though it forces you to work harder, for I intend to make progress in the face of the opposition."

10:27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the house-tops. This Hebrew parallelism may identify *what must be revealed* in the preceding verse. However, this sentence could also be

an independent thought, not entirely connected with the preceding, hence the other interpretations are also offered in verse 26. It may be that Jesus is taking the foregoing thought in a specific direction, even though verse 26 itself permitted wider application.

What I tell you means Jesus' own teaching, that is what must be revealed, not more nor less. A man has nothing worthwhile to say who has not listened to Jesus and learned. But having learned, a man has to speak what he has heard from Christ, as if he were standing himself in the presence of the living God. (Cf. 2 Co. 2:17; 12:19; 1 Pet. 4:11) This is the principle truth of which Jesus guarantees the triumph.

What I tell you in the darkness, . . . what you hear in the ear is that classified information He had intrusted to the inner corps of disciples, much of which He required to be kept confidential until the proper moment. (Cf. Mt. 16:20; 17:9) The time would come when the Lord could make clear His own true nature and identity as well as vindicate His program. But that time was not yet, since, for a long time then future, He must use dark parables for the masses, while taking His close disciples aside to explain their meaning in private. (Cf. Mt. 13:10-17)

In harmony with the suggested outline of this discourse, indicated in the Introduction to Chapter 10, it should be noted that this demand for the widest possible publicity for Jesus' teachings proves that He is now referring to a period in the disciples' work later than Pentecost, when the Christians' witnessing was geared to a world-wide evangelistic effort. (Mt. 28:19, 20; cf. Mt. 17:9: "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead.")

Speak ye in the light . . . proclaim upon the house-tops. When the moment came for the Apostles to break the story, they were to show aggressive courage in publishing it. (Cf. Ac. 4:13-20, 23-31; 5:20, 29-32, 41, 42; Eph. 6:19, 20; Ezek. 3:9) **The house-tops**, or the flat roofs of Palestinean houses, were the scenes of many activities. (Dt. 22:8; Josh. 2:6-8; Judg. 16:27; 1 Sam. 9:25; 2 Sam. 11:2; Neh. 8:16; Isa. 15:3; Mt. 24:17; Ac. 10:9) Plummer (*Luke*, 318) claims that "to this day proclamations are often made from the housetops." This makes it evident that Jesus is pleading for the widest possible publication of His message, a fact that demands that the Church adopt every medium her finances can reach, that succeeds in bringing the Word to the greatest number of hearers.

2. THE RIGHT REVERENCE (10:28)

Right after picturing nothing better than "blood, sweat and

tears” for His men, the Lord demanded that they not only fly in the face of the enemy but bombard his fortresses with the most vigorous public proclamations of the Kingdom of God. This is entirely foolhardy from any human point of view, for if Jesus is serious, He is asking His followers to commit social, religious, political and individual suicide. But Jesus is just that serious, and He is expecting His men to go on these suicide missions. (Cf. 10:38, 39) He knew fully well that His people were going to be reduced to “fools for Christ’s sake, the scum of the earth, the dregs of humanity.” (Cf. I Co. 4:9-13) He also knew that only genuine disciples can be made to suffer to this extent in order to carry out His mission to the world. But He must provide them the motive strong enough to drive them forward no matter the cost, the obstacles or temporary set-backs. He must stiffen the moral reserves of the very men whom He must continually scold for having painfully too little faith. (Cf. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Mk. 16:14) But this cannot be done merely by showing them that their fear is without basis. They need stronger compulsion than this! Intellectually based convictions are absolutely necessary, but they must be deep enough to touch the sentiments, the emotions, fundamental enough to activate the will in only one direction despite all opposition. So the Creator of men here reaches into His men and takes hold of one of their most fundamental drives: fear. But notice His tactic: before He sets the right reverence, the proper fear, before their eyes, He removes the mistaken fear.

10:28 And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Those that kill the body is the way Jesus labels the enemy, and his disciples cannot miss the implication. Jesus spares no words now as He bares the horrible reality that lurks just ahead for His people! The early Christians, along with their thrilling stories of heroic martyrs, also honestly remember those black days for the Church when fear of physical death tempted many to deny any relationship with their Lord. But the fearful torments and horrible death to which the persecutors can put the human body are not to be permitted to dim the disciple’s view of God! Jesus wants His men to be able, even in the very face of their tormentors and murderers, to look up and see Him who is invisible, the real Governor and Judge of the universe. (Cf. Heb. 11:27) Their loyalty to Him and their even more painful awareness of His judgment, despite their seemingly endless pain, affliction and brutal death, are to hold them firm. (Cf. 2 Co. 4:7-

12, 16—5:11a; see how Paul develops this motif further.) How different is the ring of these words of Jesus from those frightened excuses of those moral cowards who would try to justify the committing of any sin, merely in order to have one's life! This is the kind of challenge that appeals to real men and contains within itself ample motive for enduring whatever suffering must be faced for Jesus' sake!

Right at the very heart of this bloody description of apparent defeat for the Christians is another bold declaration that guarantees victory for the man who accepts the presuppositions on which it is based. Those **that kill the body . . . are not able to kill the soul!** The presuppositions will be discussed later. Luke (12:4b), on another occasion, includes the victorious shout of the Christian, even while gasping his last: ". . . after these things, they HAVE NO MORE THAT THEY CAN DO." Matthew's word is just as forceful: "They CANNOT KILL THE SOUL." The frustrated murderers stand helpless before a broken hunk of human clay! Their prey has escaped beyond their grasp: the Christian witness has just been introduced into the presence of his King! But, mark, it is Jesus who makes this declaration, and it is Jesus who showed how to make it work. Morgan (*Matthew*, 109) puts it beautifully:

There is no utterance more vibrant with victory. . . . Presently this King went to the Cross without faltering, without flinching, with regal bearing, so that the man who condemned Him look for all time mean and contemptible in His presence.

The presuppositions involved in Jesus' demand cry out for examination, since He who created man (Jn. 1:3) and knows what is in man (Jn. 2:25) is making a clear pronouncement on human psychology, which at such a critical moment in the service of His servants, i.e. when they face trials, persecution and death for Him, must not be merely nice theory. Jesus must express something here that is fundamental to the very essence of humanity, if He would provide any real comfort to suffering disciples. Jesus states without explanation that **the soul** (*psychē*), as over against **the body** (*sōma*) is a reality to be reckoned with. Death separates **the soul** from **the body**, since persecutors and murderers were powerless to damage **the soul**. On the other hand, God could certainly touch the psyche, bringing both it and the (resurrected) body into judgment and condemn the whole man! (Cf. Jn. 5:24-29; Rev. 20:11-15; Ac. 24:15) Out of this information arise several important conclusions:

1. Man is not merely an animal, although his mammalian body certainly shares many characteristics with animals. The destiny of his psyche is not enmeshed with that of his body. (It is the other way around, Ro. 8:23) Therefore his morality must not be that of an animal morality devolving into "civilized bestiality." His psyche certainly lives in the body and is definitely influenced to a certain extent by it. (See I Pet. 2:11; 4:1-6; Gal. 5:17, 24; Ro. 6:1—8:39) But Jesus' demand (and the Apostolic theology of the NT backs Him up) is that man's psyche is that part of man which makes the decisions, hence is responsible to God. (Cf. Mt. 10:39; 16:24-27; Lk. 12:20; Rev. 6:9; 20:4; 2 Co. 5:10; Ro. 13:11-14)
2. Man's soul, contrary to the views of many, has real existence beyond the grave, and after the resurrection of the just and unjust (Jn. 5:28, 29) must stand whole, body and soul reunited, before his Maker to give account. And in this state God will destroy those fearful recreants who denied Jesus.

It is fruitless to speculate whether God intends to annihilate the wicked after their judgment ("destroy the soul and body in gehenna,") since many clear texts and single Greek words (like *apòllumi*, *apoleia*, *olethros*) solve the problem by stating in unequivocal language what the fate of the wicked shall be after a few billion years more or less. However, we must remember that human language is a very limited tool for describing the exact nature of the fate of the wicked, since that is not an experience which is common enough to humans to require words to express it. Even the best of human language to express this is figurative, since we have not experiences of infinity (boundless space) or eternity (endless time) or hell (endless punishment). So, every word God has used to warn us of the latter is a word borrowed from the usual human vocabulary, invented to describe the experiences we do have. (See below on "Gehenna" and compare the same figurative use of language to describe heavenly realities, Rev. 21, 22.)

So what the Scriptures actually do produce is a *picture* of what the fate of the wicked will be *like*. Just as the reality of God's plans for the saved will

be better than any word-picture He has drawn of it, so the reality of God's punishment for the wicked can be worse than any terms He has used to describe it.

Even if annihilation were the actual meaning of the Bible language, this offers no hope in any way to the sinner who hopes to have his way in this life, dash through God's judgment on his way out past a short period of punishment for his misdeeds, after which he just fades out into a blissful non-existence. There is no hope even in what the human sinner thinks will be "non-existence," since God is able to punish him even in that state which human beings describe as "non-existence." How? Even if God had used the word "non-existence" or "annihilation," it does not follow that the sinner fully understands the objective reality God is describing by that term, any better than he understands "inextinguishable fire" or "undying worms." (Cf. Mt. 3:12; Mk. 6:48)

In an excellent article that presents the view held by this author, James Orr (*ISBE*, 2501-2504), after giving practically unassailable Scriptural evidence for the view that the finally unrepentant will be eternally punished, still remarks:

While dogmatisms like the above (i.e. universal salvation, annihilation and second probation, HEF), which seem opposed to Scripture, are to be avoided, it is equally necessary to guard against dogmatisms of an opposite kind, as if eternity must not, in the nature of the case, have its undisclosed mysteries of which we here in time can frame no conception. The difficulties connected with the ultimate destinies of mankind are truly enormous, and no serious thinker will minimize them. Scripture does not warrant it in negative, any more than in positive, dogmatisms; with its uniformly practical aim, it does not seek to satisfy an idle curiosity (cf. Lk. 13:23, 24). Its language is bold, popular, figurative, intense; the essential idea is to be held fast, but what is

said cannot be taken as a directory to all that is to transpire in the ages upon ages of an unending duration. God's methods of dealing with sin in the eternities may prove to be as much above our present thoughts as His dealings now are with men in grace. In His hands we must be content to leave it, only using such light as His immediate revelation yields.

For further notes on the punishment of the wicked, see below.

3. Another important conclusion that comes out of this revelation of the dual nature of man is the realization that Jesus is challenging to the very core His disciples' real acceptance of the existence of the spirit world. In the most emphatic way the Lord is demanding that they decide immediately whether they believe in His dual-sided world view with its immediate, tangible, physical world so near at hand, and its invisible, apparently distant world of the spirit. This contrast will become even sharper as well as more evident later (vv. 32, 33): "men (here on earth)" versus "my Father who is in heaven."

But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Here again the Master puts the real faith of His people to the test by probing their grasp of this reality: "You stand, not before the judgment of human persecutors but before the bar of God!" (see on vv. 32, 33) He is sounding out the firmness of their real convictions about future, hence seemingly unreal, events. He does this, because He knows there is nothing so anchoring to the soul as a sound eschatology. **But rather fear him.** There is nothing basically wrong with being afraid, since God Himself created in us this drive to self-protection, of which fear is the emotional expression. The burning question is, then, not whether we should fear or not, but of WHOM should we be afraid, of dying men or of the living God? Bruce (*Training*, 114) reminds us that "the wisdom of the serpent lies in knowing what to fear."

That we may assume that **him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell** is God, and not Satan, is proved by the observation that, while "the tempter . . . is him who, when one is in danger, whispers, Save thyself at any sacrifice of principle or conscience," (Bruce, *Training*, 115), Satan is not the ultimate reality, not the final Judge with whom we have to do. It is true that his con-ning results in getting men *destroyed in hell*, but he himself will

suffer the same fate at the hands of the living God against whom he has led the human rebellion. (Rev. 20:10-15) So it is God who executes the sentence mentioned here and thus must be feared. Plummer (*Luke*, 319) is right to observe that "we are not in Scripture told to fear Satan, but to resist him courageously (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9); . . . 'Fear God and resist the devil' is scriptural doctrine."

But is **fear** a proper motive for ethical conduct? Jesus thinks so and does not hesitate to produce it in any disciple who is tempted to be disloyal. With so much at stake as the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and the salvation of men, especially the soul of the Christian witness himself, Jesus must appeal to the strongest motivation possible. Lenski (*Matthew*, 410) writes:

By the fear of God (He would) drive out the fear of men. . . . This is not childlike fear, the motive of filial obedience, but the terrifying fear of God's holy burning wrath which would strike us if we yielded to the fear of men and denied His Word and His will, Ps. 90:11; Mt. 3:7. This is the fear which really belongs to the enemies of God and Christ, the fear from which they try to hide by their self-deception, which yet will at last overwhelm them. It is really not to touch the disciple's heart save as a last extremity when nothing else will keep him true.

This is not a slavish fear, based only on the conviction of God's sheer power to destroy, a conviction bare of any sense of His love or justice. It is rather a fear of God because He is right. Our deep sense of the sheer holiness of God will not only deepen our fear that God will punish us, but it strengthens our fear that we should grieve His love. Here is a paradox: He teaches us to fear, that we might be fearless! The explanation: the man who fears God has nothing else to fear. Yes, fear is a worthy motive for ethical conduct. Bruce (*Training*, 114) points out that "there are two kinds of deaths, one caused by the sword, the other by unfaithfulness to duty." In so saying, he puts his finger on the menace of "the second death." (Cf. Rev. 20:11-15) Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 400) carries the thought further:

There are things which are worse than death; and disloyalty is worse than death. If a man is guilty of disloyalty, if he buys security at the expense of dishonour, life is no longer tolerable. He cannot face men; he cannot face himself; and ultimately he cannot face God. There are times when comfort, safety, ease, life itself can cost too much.

The most cruel persecution is child's play compared with falling into the hands of the living God! (Heb. 10:26-39) While fear is not the highest motive for ethical conduct and granted that love and a sense of duty should be the driving force that keeps a Christian faithful under fire, Jesus meets His disciples where they might be at their weakest. He says, "If you must fear, fear God!" (For the other side of the question, see my article "The Reasonableness of the Redeemer's Rewards for Righteousness," *Matthew*, I, 198-201.)

Destroy both soul and body in hell. Hell here is not a literal translation of Jesus' word, but it is a good paraphrase of His meaning. Jesus said "*Gebenna*," and, in so doing, illustrated perfectly the state of our knowledge (or better: our ignorance) of the spirit-world just beyond this life, as well as illustrating what is meant by the word "revelation." As stated above, we do not have any absolutely correct or even adequate concept of "hell," so anything God (or Jesus here) wants to say about His punishment of the wicked, He must reduce to human concepts, language and thought-forms. That is, He wants us to understand something significant about it; otherwise, He could "tell it the way it is" and still leave us in the dark about its nature, because of our inability to understand such profound concepts. Jesus makes a passing reference to a place where God destroys people, "*in Gebenna*," (*en geénnē*). Though *Gebenna* is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *Gē-Hinnom*, "valley of Hinnom," referring to a ravine south of Jerusalem, its literal meaning has little to do with eternal divine wrath. But every time the word is used in the NT it designates the place of eternal punishment of the wicked. (See Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43; 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6) How *Gebenna* came to mean *hell* is not so important at this point as the fact that it DOES mean it.

Two causes are offered to explain this use of the "valley of Hinnom" as the technical designation for the place of final punishment. This valley of Jerusalem has been the zone near Jerusalem where the abominable worship of Molech was perpetrated (cf. Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Ch. 28:3; 33:6). Due to this practice, when these repulsive idolatries were abolished by King Josiah (2 Kg. 23:10), the zone was defiled. Later Jeremiah (7:32; 19:1-13), in reference to this defiled area, prophesied that all Jerusalem would be so defiled. Refuse of all kinds, even human carcasses, was cast into this area, making it the garbage dump of the city. Fires were kept

burning to consume the rubbish. Gesenius (*Lexicon*, 872) takes "Topheth" as signifying a "place of burning (the dead)," and even "place of graves," although he admits that many commonly derive the word from a "place to spit upon," i.e. abhorred. However, since this place appears to have borne this name among even idolaters themselves, he prefers "a place of burning." It is this meaning that causes Isaiah to use the word *Topheth* metonymically of the burning place for the King of Assyria. The idea of Gehenna, or valley of Hinnom in which the Topheth was located, as a type of Hell seems to be derived by making a symbolic name from the above passages and from the horrible practices that took place in this valley. The continual burning of the garbage there may have also rendered the name synonymous with extreme defilement. (See *ISBE*, 1183, 1371; Edersheim, *Life*, I, 550, 551; II, 280, 281) The passage from earthly and temporal defilement in a place notorious for human sin and suffering, to the place where the wicked would be finally and eternally punished, then, becomes a natural step.

The point is that Jesus, in attempting to reveal to us what we cannot otherwise know or even imagine about the garbage dump of the universe, makes use of a well-known word that conveys to the Jewish mind all the abhorrence, defilement, pain and suffering associated with *Gehenna*, the garbage dump of Jerusalem. But this offal heap will be like no other destruction we have ever known, since its character is also like a "lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14), "eternal fire" (Mt. 18:8); a "furnace of fire" (Mt. 13:42) and yet with all the light one usually associates with fire, the same place is called "outer darkness!" (Mt. 8:12), a place where men "gnash their teeth," even though they have been toothless for years. In order to form a clear idea about the revelation Jesus has given of the ultimate fate of the unrepentant, consult the following pertinent passages: Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:8, 9; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47, 48; Lk. 12:5; Mt. 23:15, 33; 8:12; 13:41, 42; 22:13; 25:41, 46; Jas. 3:6; Lk. 16:22-24, 28; Jude 12, 13; Rev. 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8; 2 Th. 1:6-9. Two excellent articles on the question are Foster's "The Teaching of Jesus Concerning Hell," (*The Final Week*, 102-119) and Orr's article "Punishment" in *ISBE*, 2501ff.

What a motive for endurance! Those who have put God in His rightful place in their scheme of things and fully understood what this must mean to them in the moment of trial before human tor-

mentors, have nothing more serious to fear than death from them. But those who have not settled this one fundamental question, or who have settled it wrongly, must necessarily find themselves prey to the usual human terrors and die a thousand times before their deaths. (Cf. Isa. 8:11-15; I Pet. 3:14; Heb. 13:6; Rev. 2:10)

3. THE CARE OF THE CREATOR (10:29-31)

Here is Jesus' next motive for steadfastness despite all that man can contrive. God is not merely the Judge before whom the disciples must stand: He is **your Father**, and, with this word that evokes all of the encouraging, comforting power of that relationship, the Lord excites all the unyielding incorruptible allegiance that family pride can demand. Here is the perfect mixture of a proper fear of the Lord nicely balanced with a confident love for the Father. Jesus is not satisfied to place before His people only the sterile fear of a critical Judge. Nor can He permit His children to conceive of Him as an indulgent "great Buddy in the skies," who has only endless love and requires nothing from those selfish monsters who would call themselves His people.

10:29 **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?** Jesus' use of *ouchi* instead of *mē*, indicates that He expected His listeners to agree that this was the going price on these seemingly insignificant birds, incidentally informing us that **sparrows** were an article of commerce. *ISBE* (2839) comments: "This is a reference to the common custom of the East of catching small birds, and selling them to be skinned, roasted and sold as tid-bits—a bird to a mouthful." **And not one of them shall fall on the ground**, whether caught in a trap (cf. Ps. 91:3; 124:7; Prov. 6:5) or killed, **without your Father's** "knowledge and consent" (*àneu toú patròs humòn*, Arndt-Gingrich, 64). **Not one of them:** this is a bit more expressive than "none of them" taken in a collective sense, even though, ultimately, the general meaning is the same. This throws the emphasis upon the one bird: "Not even one of them," though many of them could be bought for little. The bird-seller in the market would cry "Two sparrows for one thin copper coin! Today five birds for the price of four, with one thrown into the bargain!" (Cf. Lk. 12:6) This means that even the odd sparrow, the one thrown in for good measure, is dear to God. Luke has "Not one of them is forgotten before God." Jesus could not have made it any plainer that each and every bird is individually present in God's mind when it dies. This will be driven home when He makes His application in verse 31.

Your Father is a far different concept from "the Creator of sparrows," as far different as the emotional impact that it makes. (See notes on 6:26, 32, Vol. I) While assuring us of God's omniscience, the Savior intimates that our Father not only knows such detailed information as the fall of sparrows, but feels and cares about us.

10:30 **But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.** Several commentators have insisted upon the difference between "counting" hairs and "numbering" them. Does the Greek word *arithméo* justify this distinction?

1. If so, then perhaps Morgan (*Matthew*, 110) is right in saying, Jesus said God *numbers* them. Counting is a human process. Numbering is more than counting. It is attaching a value to every one, almost labeling each; a far more wonderful thing than counting.

Or, as Lenski (*Matthew*, 412) has it:

Jesus says that each hair is not only counted as one but has its own number and is thus individually known and distinguished. So if any one hair is removed, God knows precisely which one it is.

2. However, Arndt-Gingrich (105) translate *arithméo* simply "count," which, in relation to the practical insignificance of human hairs in the universe, may merely affirm that Jesus' expression is but a proverbial expression, without intending to affirm that God spends His time operating a current file on the past, present and future vicissitudes of hairs! (Cf. I Sam. 14:45; 2 Sam. 14:11; Lk. 21:18; Ac. 27:34)

Thus, in these two parallel illustrations, Jesus advances His argument from God's interest and care about relatively minute things outside us, to God's care for minutiae connected with us. The smaller the object used as a basis of comparison, the less its value, the greater is the force of Jesus' argument: God knows what is happening to His children, and He knows how to care for them. This puts muscle into the demand the Lord had made earlier that the Apostles go out without what would seem to be absolutely necessary provisions. (10:9, 10)

10:31 **Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows.** This deliberate understatement is similar to another: "If your Father notes the fall of the tiniest sparrow, do you suppose He could somehow miss a Boeing 747?" (Cf. Mt. 12:12)

Not only is man so much larger than a sparrow, and consequently would be more obvious visible to the gaze of God, but also man is of so much more consequence to God than any number of other creatures. But Jesus is not describing the importance of His Twelve Apostles alone, so much as He is pointing to the excelling importance of any disciple. (Cf. Lk. 12:6, 7)

Fear not therefore. This admonition connects this lovely picture of the love of God, with the horrible revelations of the uncertainties and the unknowns in the disciples' future, mentioned earlier. But this is just the point: God's concern for and care of His people is not just "pie in the sky by and by," but practical strengthening, comfort and provision in the present. **Fear**, then, is SIN and punishable in hell. The list of hell's inmates has "the cowardly, the timid, those without faith" at the top of the list! (Rev. 21:8) This is because **fear** presupposes that God is somehow paying no attention to our needs or else our plight could somehow escape His notice. **Fear** would even blame God for appearing not to care about us or feel our weakness or pain. **Fear** would hold that the mere mechanics of running the universe, a task suitable for an omnipotent and omniscient Being, could occupy the entire attention of Him who created man for His own fellowship! To this Jesus cries: "No! Your care, your needs, your struggles, your suffering—YOU are of more value to God than any combination of intricate or minute details involved in steering the stars or spotting sparrows!" What a motive for enduring faithfully whatever may come! Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 402) puts it so well:

God's love for men is seen not only in the omnipotence of creation and the great events of history; it is also seen in the day-to-day nourishment of the bodies of men. (Cf. Psa. 136, esp. v. 25) The courage of the King's messenger is founded on the conviction that, whatever happens, he cannot drive beyond the love and care of God. He knows that his times are forever in God's hands; that God will not leave him nor forsake him; that he is surrounded for ever by the care of God. And if this is so—of whom then shall we be afraid?

Is it possible to imagine, much less actually meet, the man who was in want, because he had trusted God too much and gave too much to Christ and His work? Even if that man loses every possession he ever owned and actually were wondering where his next meal were coming from, would he consider himself in want, so great is his love

for and dependence upon God? Jesus takes man's other responsibilities into consideration elsewhere (see notes on Mt. 6:19-34), so He is not encouraging indolence at all. Rather, the commands in this context require that the disciple work to the limit of his capacity as if everything depended upon his achievement, and God will provide his needs, since, ultimately, everything depends upon God.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the figures of speech involved in this section, showing to what Jesus referred by each figure: "sheep," "wolves," "serpents," "doves."
2. Name several occasions upon which the very things predicted in this passage actually took place in the life and ministry of the people regarding whom Jesus was here speaking. Show how they responded in splendid obedience to Jesus' instructions.
3. List the specific instructions Jesus gave whereby the disciples were psychologically prepared to avoid anxiety.
4. What does Jesus mean by the expression: "It is not you that speak but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you"?
5. To the end of what must the disciples endure?
6. Explain why the disciples were to flee to another city when they were not received in one city.
7. List some of the various explanations offered for the phrase: "till the Son of man be come," and then give your reasons why you accept the interpretation you do.
8. Explain what Jesus meant by the reference to students and teachers, servants and lords. How does this reference advance His argument?
9. Define the word "Beelzebul" and explain its reference in this context.
10. Explain the reference to revealing what has been covered or hid. About what part of the disciples' ministry was Jesus talking? Was this a promise or a threat, an encouragement or a warning, or both?
11. How did people account for the miracles of Jesus? How did others account for the miraculous phenomenon seen among the Apostles at Pentecost?
12. What is Jesus' meaning in His argument about who has real power to destroy both soul and body?
13. To whom does Jesus refer when He describes someone who can destroy both body and soul in hell?

10:32-39

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

14. In this serious discussion involving the life and death questions touching the survival of His disciples, what is the point of the reference to the price of sparrows?
15. In what other connections had Jesus used His argument based on the value of sparrows and the exact count of hairs on one's head? What is the underlying connection in each case that makes this a pithy proverb expressing a great truth?
16. Does the expression "destroy both soul and body in hell" refer to total annihilation of the wicked or those who deny Christ, or is this merely a vivid expression describing eternal punishment? On what basis do you answer as you do?
17. Give a short summary of the biblical teaching on the subject of "hell." In so doing, explain the reference to "Gehenna."
18. State the declarations in this text that suggest or openly emphasize Jesus' divine authority.

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE
APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

IV. JESUS REQUIRES AND REWARDS
LOYALTY OF HIS SERVANTS

TEXT: 10:32-39

A. THE SUPREME HONOR FOR LOYALTY (10:32)

32. Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.

B. THE SUPREME DISGRACE FOR DISLOYALTY
OR COWARDICE (10:33)

33. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

C. THE INEVITABLE ENMITIES INVOLVED IN
LOYALTY TO JESUS (10:34-36)

34. Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to

35. send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the
36. daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household.

D. THE SECRET OF SUCCESS THROUGH
SACRIFICE AND SURRENDER (10:37-39)

37. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
38. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not
39. worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. This revelation of "blood, sweat and tears," of trial, suffering and death must have been very discouraging to Jesus' disciples as He sent them out. Yet Jesus considered this revelation absolutely necessary to the adequate accomplishment of their mission. Can you show several reasons why He would have predicted these painful pictures? This is surely no way to hold one's disciples, is it? Would this tactic win friends and influence people today? Why?
- b. In what way do you think Jesus had in mind that the disciples would be "confessing Him before men"? Under what sort of circumstances would they be doing this? Sometimes this passage is cited to indicate the necessity for a public declaration of one's willingness to follow Christ, a declaration which is made before the congregation of believers at the conclusion of a Sunday morning gathering for worship. Is this what Jesus had in mind? if so, how could such an application be justified? If not, why not? How does such an application fit the antithesis: "denying Him before men"?
- c. Have you ever denied Jesus before men since becoming His disciple? Be honest now. How, when, where and why did you do it? What encouragement do you find in this text that strengthens you against repeating that sin?
- d. Do you think it would have been better or worse for Jesus' disciples (you included) had Jesus not told this bitter truth about the consequences of being persecuted as His disciple? Why?

- e. Do you think that the Prince of Peace can be telling the truth when He denies that His purpose was to bring peace on earth? Did not the angels shout the news from heaven that Jesus' birth meant peace? How, then, can Jesus expect us to believe that His purpose for coming to earth was not to bring peace, but, rather, a sword? What kind of peace does Jesus reject and what kind of sword does He bring?
- f. Some think that Jesus did not intend to bring a sword to earth, that it was not His *purpose*, but only the *result* of His work. Do you agree? If so, on what basis? If not, why not?
- g. Do you think that it is right to go around splitting up families over religion? If so, then how do you understand the most basic of all commandments to "honor your father and mother" and similar commands regarding family care? If not, then how do you justify Jesus' avowed purpose to set members of the same family against each other?
- h. Do you think that Jesus knew from personal experience what He was here declaring, regarding "enemies in one's own home"? What makes you say this?
- i. Is there anyone really "worthy of" Jesus? Then, what does Jesus mean by declaring that anyone who does not make the necessary sacrifices is "not worthy of me"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"So every one who stands up and acknowledges that he is my disciple, I will gladly own him as my own in front of the great Judge, my Father in heaven. But I will repudiate before God anyone who either is afraid to stand up for me in front of men or else publicly denies being my disciple.

"You must never suppose that my mission is to bring peace on earth at any price. In fact, that kind of peace is impossible. My mission is rather to separate the wicked from the truly righteous, but this is going to cause trouble. I will not have peace at the expense of truth! Allegiance to me is going to cause, for example, a man to be set against his own father or a daughter against her own mother! A young wife will go against her mother-in-law. A fellow will find enemies right under his own roof!

"No one who cares more for his father or his mother than he does for me deserves to belong to me! The same is true of the man who holds his son or daughter dearer to him than he does me: he does not deserve to belong to me! Likewise the man who refuses to be

crucified, because he is walking in my footsteps, is not fit to be called my disciple! If you hold your own life dear, I can guarantee you that you will lose it. But the man who will let himself be killed for MY sake, saves his life forever!

SUMMARY

You, my disciples, do not stand before the judgment seat of Herod or imperial Rome: you stand before the judgment throne of the living God! You must decide now how it will fare with you then: I will own or disown you as my disciples before God, on the basis of your allegiance or disloyalty here on earth. This choice is not a simple one, because it is going to rearrange all your present loyalties. You will have to decide whether your family is to come first, ahead of your loyalty to me. This choice may lead you to your death, but remember: the prudent are damned! He who is willing to give up everything he holds dear—even his own life—just to please me, will be able to secure the only life that is worth living! But decide, and decide now.

NOTES

A. THE SUPREME HONOR FOR LOYALTY (10:32)

10:32 **Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men**, is the broad, general introduction to this audacious declaration of Jesus' regal authority. This dictum has to do with disciples in general. Its universal character becomes immediately clear if we artificially insert the word "apostle," so as to make the sentence apply only to the Twelve. While the Apostles themselves certainly and rightly took this admonition personally, nevertheless, its very general character is not only very apparent, but is also in perfect harmony with the more comprehensive tone of this entire concluding section (Mt. 10:24-42; see on 10:24). **Therefore** neatly links this marvelous promise to the warnings, the gentle coaxing, the facing of unpleasant realities and the challenges Jesus has just put before His people in the earlier minutes of this sermon. This is the logical conclusion especially of the demand that the disciple be absolutely fearless. (Cf. 10:19, 26, 28, 31)

While it would seem most appropriate to consider the word *oun*, here translated *therefore*, in this inferential sense, i.e. drawing a conclusion in relation to statements made before, yet the suggestion of Dana and Mantey (*Manual Grammar*,

255, 256) that *oun* here has an emphatic or intensive use, is not without merit. Some suggestive translations they would substitute for *therefore* are: "be sure that . . . , to be sure, surely, by all means, indeed, etc." Try inserting these words in place of *therefore* to feel the emphasis thus produced. However, despite the good examples adduced by Mantey, it may yet be wondered in Matthew's sentence here whether Jesus is not rather drawing a proper conclusion to all the precedes. If, then, *oun* may well have this special emphatic force, all the better for its ambiguity, since the sentiment expressed by Jesus in this sentence is easily inferential as well as emphatic.

The Master had already intimated that the disciples must fear only "Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (10:28) Here He makes this point explicit by stating it in two parallel phrases that leave little room for doubt. How well He knew the propensity of man to save his neck at all cost! Simply, almost quietly, he puts compelling authority into His speech. This is a precious promise, but its logical converse is necessarily a threat to the fearful and unbelieving, stating clearly whom we are to fear. It is Jesus who holds our fate in His hands.

Every one who shall confess me (*homologēsei en emoi*)

This seemingly unusual expression which uses the preposition *en* after the verb is not to be translated literally "confess in my case . . . I will confess in his case before the Father" (see Plummer, *Luke*, 320; Morgan, *Matthew*, 110), but is to be taken as an Aramaism because of the normal use of the preposition *be* after 'odi in that language. (Arndt-Gingrich, 571, Lenski, *Matthew*, 412). The confession involved here is an agreeing with something affirmed, and admission of one's own position, a declaration more or less public of what one believes, an acknowledgement to being or believing something.

What or whom is the disciple to confess? His belonging to a particular sect of the Church? His adherence to a temporary formulation of the Gospel, a creed? His support of certain ecclesiastical organizations and programs? His understanding or interpretation of certain Scripture texts? According to Jesus, what is the critical issue, the only really burning question? **Whoever shall confess ME.** What a man thinks about Jesus is the only important issue over which he should have to stand trial and give account, because if he be mistaken about this one question, how can he be right, or even significantly near it, in relation to any other issue? There is so much clear evidence for a proper decision regarding Jesus, that to

fail to decide rightly about Him, automatically affects one's ability to evaluate the evidence on all other significant questions. While it may be admitted that many wise and good men of earth have both studied the evidence about Jesus and have rejected Him as supreme Lord, still the Master Himself is here declaring that such men damn themselves, since the imperious nature of His double affirmation (10:32, 33) presumes that the evidence He has given to lead to a right decision has been both sufficient and clear. The problem lies then not in the nature of the evidence but in the moral makeup of the men whose intellectual bias did not permit them to evaluate properly the evidence or surrender their will to Him. The Judge here expresses His opinion on the "wisdom" and "goodness" of those men, who, whether ignorant, deceived or conceited, reject Him.

But does this confession of Jesus mean merely to acknowledge adherence to certain propositions regarding His identity, position and consequent authority? At least this, (Ro. 10:9, 10; Ac. 2:36; I Jn. 2:22, 23; 4:2, 3, 15; 2 Jn. 7, 9) But it is more, for how can one confess the absolute lordship of Jesus while at the same time ignoring the plain import of any command, declaration, promise or warning He gives? (Lk. 6:46) He is then to be confessed:

1. by our recognizing and responding to His position and function;
2. by our recognition of His authorized representatives (Mt. 10:40);
3. by our recognition of His message (Lk. 9:26; Jn. 12:47-50);
4. by our recognition of Him in His people (Mt. 25:40, 45; Ac. 9:4, 5);
5. by our joyful admission that we personally are committed to Him because we need, trust and love Him and try to serve Him as Lord of all lords;
6. by that obvious consistency between our profession of adherence to Him and our personal morality that truly and deeply affects all our attitudes and actions.

There may be other expressions of our confession, but these are sufficient to suggest that they all have importance because of what we think about Jesus. We will be willing to die before relenting on any proposition regarding Jesus' person. Witness the Virgin-birth controversy and the vigorous rejection of the modern Arianism of the Jehovah's Witnesses who, like Arius of Alexandria (c. 313 A.D.), deny the identity of Jesus with Jehovah God. We spend years of

careful research, examining the authenticity, reliability and integrity of the documents of the Apostles, just because our confession of Christ depends for its content upon the dictates of those books. Witness the several hundred-years war that has raged in the field of biblical criticism. Further, our confession of Jesus drives us to "lay down our lives for the brethren," since, in confessing Him, we confess those who belong to Him.

But someone might object that, contextually, Jesus has in mind most probably a hostile situation in which the disciple is called upon to admit (or deny) his discipleship to Jesus on pain of death. But it is most significant that Jesus just ordered, "Confess me before men," without specifying which men, whether hostile, indifferent or friendly. Even otherwise friendly men (they might even be Christians!), who are themselves unwilling to pay the high costs of discipleship, can make it very difficult for the earnest disciple to confess his loyalty to Jesus in the little, but practical, business of everyday's living. They dampen his enthusiasm, lest his zeal expose their lack of it, when in reality their befouled conscience demands that they follow his good example. It may be even more difficult to remain morally alert and skillful in confessing Christ in some "Christian" environments than in those openly hostile. **Before men** only means "publicly" and reminds us of the earlier command to give Christ's message the widest possible coverage (10:26, 27, despite the ever-present menace of those who can kill the body. (10:28)) The only justification for the Church's existence is to "proclaim the wonderful deeds and moral excellence of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Pet. 2:9) This is the work of the Church, as Morgan put it (*Matthew*, 107):

The work to be done is not described in detail here, but it is inferentially seen. It is that of confessing Christ, before men. That is the Church's work. It is all-inclusive. When we have said that, we have said everything we can say about the Apostles, the evangelist, the prophet, the pastor and teacher, and the disciple and servant. Whatever our gift may be within the Church, or as a member of the Church, our work is to confess Christ before men. . . . By confession we are to reveal Him; to flash His glory, to make Him known. The Church of Jesus Christ is not constituted in order to discuss philosophies or indulge in speculations. It is created to confess Christ, and it never ought to rest for one moment until the last weary, sin-bound soul, in the

furthest region of the world, has heard His evangel, has beheld His glory.

This confession is not merely that initial commitment to Jesus made at the beginning of our discipleship nor merely that bold declaration stated at trials where life or death is riding with the answer. It is, rather, the normal way of life and work of every single disciple whereby he shows who his real Master is.

Before men is not to be construed as contrasting with "before the saints," as if Jesus meant, "before men of the world and not before the Church." Indeed, there is no command or consistent NT practice for a guide to confession exclusively before the assembly of the Church. It is, of course, reasonable and proper to declare oneself a believer in the presence of the rest of the Church, before expecting to be admitted to the group. And yet some Christians act as if only a confession before the church were here intended, and as if the public confession of faith they once made at a meeting of the Church exhausted all their responsibility in this regard. **Before men** means good men and bad, poor men and rich, ignorant and learned, Christians or not.

Before men, it is true, may well mean, and in the case of many Christians it has meant, to stand in formal trials as before councils, synagogues, governors and kings, and declare one's allegiance to the Son of God. (10:17, 18) In this sense, the Church has only one justification for getting into trouble with the law: for exalting Christ as King above Caesar and as Lawgiver above Moses or another religious tribunal or authority. But as the individual Christian stands alone before these earthly potentates, he must remember the wide disparity between the judges before whom he must give testimony. Feel the contrast: **before men . . . before my Father**; the temporary versus the eternal; the corruptible versus the gloriously incorruptible. It is a temptation to ask the obvious: who would exchange the approval of God for the applause of men? But lest we answer this too glibly, we need to see with greater clarity the difficulty of refusing *this* world that seems so much more real, because it is so much more immediate and tangible. As in verse 28, so here, Jesus reminds His people that, in reality, though they are physically standing before the judgment of infinitely feeble human judges whose ultimate jurisdiction halts at death, even though they may now have the relative ascendancy for the present, yet in such moments these same disciples are under the even more critical scrutiny of the unseen, living God, the Judge whose unlimited authority and power

execute a verdict of infinitely greater consequence! The Savior knows that this dilemma between life, peace and security with the approval of earth's enemies of the faith on the one hand, and life, peace and security in the judgment of God on the other, is capable of resolution only to the man who has already died to this world and all its relationships. (See on 10:34-39)

What is to be gained by confessing Christ? **Him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.** Since Jesus has made ^{it} this clear beforehand, the disciple can have peace-bringing confidence throughout his life, since he need not fear the judgment. (Cf. I Jn. 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14; Ro. 10:9, 10; Heb. 3:6; 10:19-23, 35) While we actively confess Jesus Christ on earth, our prayers obtain a receptive hearing with God, for our Mediator through Whom we pray acknowledges that we are His, as our faithful confession testifies. (I Tim. 2:5, 6) There is the joy of sharing His suffering, since we see ourselves identified with the Lord Himself who has passed this moment of trial too. (Cf. I Pet. 4:13; Phil. 3:10; I Tim. 6:13) There is also that rejoicing that comes from an approving conscience that knows the gladness at having victoriously passed the critical moment of trial. (Cf. Ac. 4:23-31; 5:40-42) Sometimes during the days of fixing of the revelation, such bold confession was blessed with deliverance from danger. (Cf. Peter, Ac. 5:12-42; 12:1-17; Paul, 2 Tim. 4:16, 17) But not always, as the traditionally brutal deaths of these same Apostles testify. But the principle promise of Jesus here is that willing acknowledgement whereby Jesus endorses us as His disciples before the Father at the great accounting.

This is the fifth motive for enduring the dangers and hardships faced by disciples in this life. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a motivation higher than this: to accept all the pain and death in the service of Jesus Christ and know that the conclusion of life brings us, not judgment, but joy! To be personally introduced to God just because we did only what it was our duty to do is nothing short of incredible! (Cf. Lk. 17:10) How many of the little people of earth long for just a glimpse of the earth's great ones! How very few are permitted a private audience with the great, or are privileged to be their intimate friends. But not only to be presented to God but also permitted to live with Him for eternity: this is too good to be true! (Rev. 3:5; 20:11-15; 21:1-7) But how can God permit so great a reward for so insignificant a response on our part? Two reasons:

1. Confession of Christ, with all that this involves, is not insignificant, since this affects every facet of our lives and is the very life-direction of a disciple.
2. Our Father intends to save the saveable on the basis of His mercy. None can presume to earn His reward by putting Him in debt to them merely because they, sinners, confess Jesus. On the other hand, God's plan is to draw us to Him by exalting Jesus. So if we but confess Jesus as Lord to the glory of God the Father, He is more than willing to consider us as righteous even though we are not, because we are willing to trust Him. (Cf. Ro. 3:21-26; 4:1—5:1)

The question arises at this point whether Christians will actually have to stand trial on that great day. This hesitant doubt is suggested by passages as John 5:24, "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life; he does not come into judgment (*krisin*), but has passed from death to life." (Cf. Jn. 5:29; 2 Pe. 2:9) But even these texts can be harmonized with the more numerous and more explicit passages which picture the believers as standing for judgment. (See passages below regarding the Judge.) They can be harmonized, since the believer accepts in Jesus Christ all the negative features of the final judgment: its revelation of the heinousness of sin, its condemnation and its sentence of punishment. These features were already accepted by him who understands the meaning of the cross, dies to himself in order to rise again to new life in the Beloved. (1 Pe. 2:24) From that moment on, all that the wicked may well fear at the hands of God, has become a matter of joyfully past history for the Christian. But it is this negative side of God's justice that is the import of the word "judgment" (*krisis*) in Jn. 5:24, 29 and 2 Pe. 2:9. The point is that every disciple will give account of himself before God and the criterion is settled by this text, since all other criteria mentioned elsewhere may be subsumed under these two words: **confess** (or *deny*) Christ before men.

But who will judge the world, God or Christ? The figure of Himself that Jesus presents here seems to be in the function of an Advocate. (Cf. I Jn. 2:1, 2) In the NT both figures are used: God is the Judge of all men (Heb. 12:23; I Co. 4:5; 5:13; Ro. 2:2, 3; 3:4-6; 11:33; 14:10; 1 Pe. 1:17; 2:23), but we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Co. 5:10; Jn. 5:22, 27; 9:39; Ac. 10:42; I Co. 4:4, 5; 2 Ti. 4:1). The harmony is to be found in the synthetic statement of Paul: God will judge the world by Jesus (Ac. 17:31; Ro. 2:16). What God does in the Person of Jesus, He may

be said to do for Himself. The marvelous revelation that results from these Scriptures is what the Lord actually affirms in Mt. 10:40, that he who deals with Jesus is dealing with Almighty God, and vice versa, he who would deal with God must answer to Jesus. This is the most fundamental doctrine of Christianity: only those who are recognized by Jesus are saved. Those who would climb in any other way are thieves and robbers! (Jn. 10:1-5, 7-18, 27-30; cf. Mt. 11:27; Jn. 14:6; 1 Ti. 2:5)

B. THE SUPREME DISGRACE FOR DISLOYALTY OR COWARDICE (10:33)

10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men . . .

These ominous words spell out the necessary antithesis to the glorious promise for loyalty just described. Just a glance at the sentence structure of the two declarations reveals how perfectly balanced is each element. Again the declaration is directed to any disciple, not merely the Apostles, who might be tempted to deny Christ. While this warning is specifically intended for the timorous person who, for fear of men, fails to acknowledge his allegiance to Jesus, nevertheless its practical impact will be felt by all whose lives and convictions reflect their rejection of all that He is and offers. So to **deny me before men** means to repudiate or disown Christ in any of the various expressions whereby one who is a loving disciple should have confessed Him. (Cf. Lk. 12:8, 9; Ac. 3:13, 14; Jude 4; 2 Pe. 2:1; Tit. 1:16; 1 Jn. 2:22; 1 Ti. 5:8; 2 Ti. 2:11-13; Rev. 2:13; 3:8)

To **deny me before men** has a more ominous side than most recognize. Even amateur philosophers can become quite adept at pointing out the fatal flaw in others' philosophies, or views of life. This fatal flaw is but that noticeable inconsistency between the official or stated conclusions of a theory, and the way that the philosopher himself lives or practices that theory. Many Christians speak loudly about the supreme lordship of Jesus of Nazareth, thinking thereby to do Him honor by so fine and public a confession. But in unguarded moments they damn themselves intellectually in the eyes of worldlings who really know something of the will of Christ, and they are probably damning themselves eternally in the eyes of Jesus, when they fail to produce in words or deeds or attitudes what their confession demands of them at those critical moments where their real religion may be tested most surely. Listen, for

example, to the comments, feelings or answers a given Christian expresses to the following questions:

1. Do you think some people are expendable if they refuse to support your church program?
2. In this modern world is it possible to practice the "other cheek policy," when the individual Christian is insulted?
3. Who do you think is really well off in this world?
4. Is the possession of wealth a necessary danger to a man's Christianity?
5. Should whites (or Negroes, Chinese, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, or any other racial group being discussed) be permitted to take an active part in your church?

These deliberately loaded questions are samples of some of the ways in which a Christian unwittingly damns himself and denies Christ by allowing himself the liberty of opinion after Jesus has already spoken. Certainly there is grace and forgiveness for this, but it is important that the saint recognize that he is doing it that he might confess it, repent and be forgiven. Perhaps the esteem of the worldling may be regained too by that intellectual honesty and genuine humility that knows how to say "I have sinned, I have imperfectly represented Christ. You may judge me by Christ, but do not judge Christ by me." It is painfully obvious that I am not yet made perfect, but I thank you for pointing out my inconsistency to me!" A Christian's confession is not a long string of pretences with regard to himself, but the consistent admission to allegiance to Jesus. Hence, when he is overtaken in any fault, in humility he can emphasize once again his deep need for and dependence upon Jesus. A confession of this sort, growing as it does out of a practical denial, can be the most beautiful and most vividly remembered.

But why would men who have known and loved Jesus, men who have even been saved from death by His power, ever be driven to the point where they would actually refuse to admit any connection with Him? Ask Peter. (Cf. Mt. 26:30-35, 69-75; Mk. 14:26-31, 66-72; Lk. 22:31-34, 54-62; Jn. 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27) In our hours of deeper reflection and honesty have we not had to weep bitterly with him, because we were not prepared for the crisis brought on by some of our own fears?

1. Our fear of being hated by men (Mt. 10:21, 22);
2. Our fear of being reviled (Mt. 10:25)

3. Our fear of being persecuted or murdered (Mt. 10:23; 5:10-12);
4. Our fear of merely losing the good-will of the people upon whom our business, our profit, our advantages and ultimately our success in life are based. (Lk. 6:22; Jn. 9:22; 16:2)

These fears and more are the precise reason why Jesus has pounded so steadily throughout this discourse on the theme: "Do not be anxious . . . Have no fear of them . . . Do not fear those who kill the body!" He knows that the fundamental instinct of self-preservation will be particularly strong in such crises. Yet even the most fundamental of human drives must never be permitted to loom larger than one's commitment to his God! Some disciples would certainly be tempted to prudence or compromise, when, in reality, this would mean a practical denial of their commitment to Him. All of the rationalizations that could be offered do not change the fact that those who make them are deceiving themselves. They but hide from themselves the real motive for their cowardice. The Master foresees and forestalls this by shouting the warning: "If to save your neck, save face, save your business, save your family, you deny your relation to me, you will lose your soul!"

Him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

The consequences of one's denial of Jesus, when properly evaluated, are, as Lenski exclaims, "terrible beyond all description!" And not all of the consequences are future:

1. The nagging awareness that the former disciple has failed under fire, that he has dishonored his Lord, is something not easily shaken off. The corrosive power of unrelieved guilt is incalculable. And Jesus' advance notice of how it will go with such a person at the judgment is deliberately calculated to produce this guilt, in the hope of hereby producing repentance. (2 Co. 7:8-11)
2. The result of a guilty conscience is a useless life, since the individual, who has once known Jesus Christ and faced the demands made upon his mind by the evidences of His Lordship, cannot find ultimate joy or contentment in lesser things. As a result he wanders from this to that, restlessly seeking some consuming passion to take the place of that Lord whom he has removed from the center of his existence. And, whether he admits, or even feels, the uselessness of his life thus lived, all the pseudo-gods he has

sought to serve prove worse than useless to help him when he stands before the living God.

3. For the man who dies in this condition, his last hours can be nothing but terrifying, since he must know that he is about to face the only Lawyer who could have pleaded his case (I Jn. 2:1, 2), but has now been raised to the bench to become his Judge (2 Co. 5:10). The sworn word of that Magistrate is: "*I will deny him!*" (Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26)

In short, from the moment of the denial, if unrepaired by repentance and vigorous confession, only a sinister future awaits this hopeless wretch. Oh my soul, can I grasp the horror, the pain and the regret of such a horrible eventuality? Can that proper fear of the Lord grip me so fast that all the menaces of men seem like the harmless barking of chained dogs?

Before my Father who is in heaven. All that has been said before about a holy God who wreaks vengeance upon impenitent sinners, and especially upon renegade disciples, is now felt in its full force. (See on 10:28) He who "falls into the hands of the living God" does so because of his failure to confess Jesus! Nothing is hidden that shall not be revealed!" (10:26) Denial of Jesus can be hidden for some time on earth, but it too will be unmercifully exposed with a finality that will last for eternity. Not only will Jesus deny the coward, the fearful and unbelieving **before the Father**, but also "before the angels of God." (Lk. 12:9) This suggests that, should even the slightest denial of Christ escape the notice of these ministering servants who labor continually on behalf of the saints, Jesus will expose even this. (Cf. Heb. 1:14; Mt. 18:11; Rev. 19:9, 10) Thus will God be fully vindicated in His judgment.

Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 403) indicated several practical ways men often deny Christ:

1. We may deny Him with our *words* . . . (Such a person) did not propose to allow his Christianity to interfere with the society he kept and the pleasures he loved. Sometimes we say to other people, practically in so many words, that we are Church members, but not to worry about it too much; that we have no intention of being different; that we are prepared to take our full share in all the pleasures of the world; and that we do not expect people to take any special trouble to respect any vague principles that we may have.
2. We can deny Him by our *silence* . . . (when there was) the opportunity to speak some word for Christ, to utter some

protest against evil, to take some stand, to show what side we are on. Again and again on such occasions it is easier to keep silence than to speak. But such silence is in itself a denial of Jesus Christ.

3. We can deny Him by our *actions*. We can live in such a way that our life is a continuous denial of the faith which in words we profess. He who has given his allegiance to the gospel of purity may be guilty of all kinds of petty dishonesties and breaches of strict honor. He who has undertaken to follow the Master who bade him take up a cross can live a life that is dominated by attention to his own ease and comfort. He who has entered the service of Him who Himself forgave and bade His followers to forgive can live a life of bitterness and resentment and variance with his fellow-men. He whose eyes are meant to be on that Christ who died for love of men can live a life in which the idea of Christian service and Christian charity and Christian generosity are conspicuous by their absence.

Our General Himself has come up through the ranks, has stood Himself precisely where He expects His troops to stand. (I Ti. 6:13; Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-9) So He is not requiring of His men one thing more than what He Himself has done. The Christian, when standing trial for his faith and adherence to Jesus in a thousand ways across the years, can take courage and remain confident, since he knows, "My Lord has stood here before!"

C. THE INEVITABLE ENMITIES INVOLVED IN LOYALTY TO JESUS (10:34-36)

After having outlined the disciples' relationships to their task, to the opposition they must expect, and to the Lord whom they serve, Jesus now describes the inescapable decisions to be made by His workers about their relationship to outsiders among whom they will live and work and to whom they are sent.

10:34 **Think not that I came to send peace on the earth.** Due to their misunderstanding of certain messianic prophecies, many Jews would have been inclined to think this very thing. (Cf. Isa. 2:2-4; 9:6, 7; 66:12; Ps. 72:7; see notes on Rabbinic thought in Edersheim, *Life*, II, 710ff.) We can sense the sheer, severe honesty of Jesus better when we remember that it was a popular Jewish conviction that the Christ would usher in an epoch of great prosperity and universal peace. This concept of Jesus not only does not

echo the materialistic expectations popular among His own people, but it also demonstrates the abyss that separated His vision of the Messianic Kingdom from theirs. The war pictured by Jesus, symbolized by the **sword**, is of an entirely different character than that envisioned by those who hoped for a monolithic national army of "Hebrews only," who would march under the Messiah against the nations of the world over which they would triumph. Jesus is no "creature of His period," but a revolutionary Creator whose original message comes from God. But those wild-eyed revolutionaries of every age who have attempted to claim Jesus' good name for their cause, or who would uphold Him as their example for disrupting normal society, must beware lest they find themselves and their declared aims in open contradiction with THIS Revolutionary! It is absolutely essential therefore that Jesus' followers not expect a fool's paradise. The painful honesty of Jesus here stands out in striking contrast to those wild enthusiasts who attract followers with seductive but delusive promises. Later, Jesus can temper the harshness of this statement, but even then, not too much: "I have said this to you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33)

I came to . . . What the Master now describes expresses the stated purpose of His earthly mission. So what He unfolds in this and the following verses is neither extra, optional nor unnecessary, since the result of this His work, the decisions His followers must make and the inevitable enmities which result are all intimately involved in Jesus' intended mission.

I came not to send peace (on the earth), but a sword. But how can this obvious declaration of the Messiah Himself be harmonized with the general picture drawn of Him as the great "prince of Peace"? (Cf. Isa. 9:6, 7; Lk. 2:14) There are two possibilities:

1. This is a Hebraistic expression, emphatically stated to carry a point without intending to exclude absolutely what is negated. (See e.g. notes on 9:13) Accordingly, Jesus is saying, "I came not only to bring peace, but also a sword." As indicated above, due to the preconceptions of that day, it was entirely essential to the successful communication of His divine message that Jesus startle His hearers, so that this particularly unwelcome news not slip past, quite unnoticed by unwary listeners.

2. Then, in harmony with the foregoing, it is also unquestionably true that Jesus did not come to bring **peace on earth** to just any and every rebel against God's good government. Though He came to bring true harmony between God and man as well as true brotherhood among men, yet to accomplish this magnificent mission, Jesus could not leave men the way they were.

But why cannot men have peace the way they are? Plummer (*Matthew*, 156) is right to point out that "peace cannot be enforced. Open hostility can be put down by force; but good will can come only by voluntary consent. So long as men's wills are opposed to the Gospel, there can be no peace." In fact, war, division and fire must necessarily break out where the claims of Jesus are proclaimed in a hostile world. Feel the intense emotion of the Lord as He speaks about this revolution. (Lk. 12:49-51) Plummer (*Luke*, 334), commenting on that text, shows the vigor and depth of His language:

The history of Christ's ministry shows that (the fire) was kindled. . . . Christ came to set the world on fire, and the conflagration had already begun. Mal. 3:2. *baptisma de echō baptisthēnai*. Having used the metaphor of fire, Christ now uses the metaphor of water. The one sets forth the result of His coming as it affects the world, the other as it affects Himself. The world is lit up with flames, and Christ is bathed in blood: Mk. 10:38.

So long as His disciples act in their true character, they are the very conscience of society. They are the very character of God walking daily among their sinful fellows, family and friends. The embarrassing contrast between righteousness and iniquity that results from this contact, must, in a thousand different ways, cause that painful condemning of the sinful practices and attitudes of those who are accustomed to that way of life. But this being the world's conscience is not easy business, because one must suffer all the excuses, evasions and harsh abuse that is the daily experience of every individual conscience.

Jesus Himself knows that He is Himself such a conscience. He too must disturb their self-complacency, awaken their deadened fear of the living God. His influence, then, cannot be peaceful in the sense that He leaves men tranquilly undisturbed. As Rix (*PHC*, 259) puts it:

(His influence) was a reforming, dividing, disturbing, dissolving, revolutionary influence. It was a pungent, painful, sacrificial influence. The history of Christianity is not a peaceful history. This fact is brought forward sometimes as a proof that Christianity has been a failure. But before we admit the validity of this objection, let us consider this prior question: is the assumption upon which it is based a valid one? Is peace the first aim of Christianity? Is it the main object of the Christian religion to give you an undisturbed and placid life? It is an ignoble view of life which regards its highest good as a placid and undisturbed existence. To live is to endure and overcome, to aspire and to attain. . . . It is not the best thing in the world for a man to have no doubts, to ask no questions, to be free from all speculation and all wonder. It is not the best thing for a man to receive his opinions ready-made and to reiterate them unthinkingly till he comes to look upon them as infallible.

But the disturbance Christ brings produces immediate war, since men perversely cling to their sins, combat Christ and His messengers and line up against those who accept His discipline. This automatically divides the world into two hostile camps. (Cf. Lk. 12:51) As Jesus will immediately point out, the lines will be drawn even in families, between those who follow Him and those who do not. But Jesus must provoke this kind of war; otherwise, men would go on to their doom perfectly satisfied with themselves, unaware of their fate.

While the figure of the **sword** may mean war, as explained above, it is also possible that the main emphasis of Jesus is on the use of a sword to split asunder what had before been of one piece or a unity. Commenting on this aspect, Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 405) says:

When some great cause emerges, it is bound to divide people; there are bound to be those who answer, and those who refuse, the challenge. To be confronted with Jesus is necessarily to be confronted with the choice whether to accept Him or to reject Him; and the world is always divided into those who have accepted Christ and those who have not.

Though He is the very bond of lasting peace and true union, Jesus Himself is the sharpest line of separation between men and the greatest disturber of easy consciences. He brought no peace to Herod or Jerusalem (Mt. 2:3). His very birth brought anguish and heart-

break to all parents in Bethlehem with boys under two. His birth brought a sword that pierced His mother's soul and signalled the rise and fall of many in Israel (Lk. 2:34, 35). The Babe's protection brought additional fears and frustrations to Joseph (Mt. 1:18, 19; 2:13, 14, 22). But the angels' song is still true for this Babe has brought "peace that passes understanding" to "men with whom (God) is well pleased." (Lk. 2:14; Eph. 2:14; Phil. 4:7) But to enjoy this peace, men have always had to decide about Jesus Christ, and this decision has involved many other choices of which the Lord now begins a short list:

10:35 **For** shows that Jesus intends to illustrate concretely what He means by a **sword**. These examples that follow are only typical and by no means propose to exhaust the divisions possible in human relationships, since other separations are obviously conceivable in families otherwise constituted. **I came to:** what follows this verb expresses the purpose and result of the Lord's earthly mission. What He lists here, then, is not avoidable, since the breakdown of some of these family ties partakes of the essential nature of the life to which the Master calls us. This crisis cannot be evaded without compromise of conscience.

**a man at variance against his father,
and the daughter against her mother,
and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.**

These words are quoted practically verbatim from Micah 7:6. Did Jesus mean for His disciples to understand Him as speaking within the framework set for them by Micah?

1. It might be that Jesus is merely appropriating the well-known expressions of the ancient prophet. Micah had used this language to describe the height of treachery rampant in an era of injustice at all levels of society. However, Jesus' context is not so much general injustice as the particular heartlessness of those who refuse to accept Jesus and the religious convictions of His disciples. It may be, then, that the Master intends only to take Micah's language proverbially, as aptly describing treachery in any age, not merely that of the prophet himself. In this case, the form, not the context, suits Jesus' purpose.
2. Keil (*Minor Prophets*, I, 507) suggests an alternate view: This verse is applied by Christ to the period of the *krisis* which will attend His coming, in His in-

struction to the apostles in Matthew 10:35, 36 (cf. Lk. 12:53) . . . in the sense, that at the outbreak of the judgment and of the visitation the faithlessness will reach the height of treachery to the nearest friends, yea, even of the dissolution of every family tie. (cf. Mt. 24:10, 12)

Apparently, Keil sees the Lord's use of this language as intending to point out a condition crying out for judgment. However, again the context here is not specifically eschatological, as Luke's seeming parallel might tend to suggest.

Since the Lord does not document His words as being those of Micah, and since His purpose differs somewhat from that of the prophet, it is probably better to see only a free use of appropriate language. Jesus' intention is to bring into sharp relief the bitterness of religious intolerance.

I came to set a man at variance against . . . Here is one of the first intimations of the individualistic and personal character of Jesus' religion. (Cf. Mt. 3:7-10) It makes a clear break with the patriarchal concept of religion whereby the whole family, including the children, by virtue of their birth into the family, become participants in all the religious privileges of the paternal head. There is no suggestion in the NT that baptism was intended as a substitute for circumcision, and thus to be applied to infants. Rather, Jesus insists here on the extremely personal character of our adherence to Him, by demanding the unhesitating severing of even the dearest relationships that become a hindrance to absolute fidelity to Him. This is not a concept, therefore, that can be applied in any sense to those without the faculty to make such a decision, i.e. infants. Yet it is a fundamental tenet in Jesus' system.

At variance against. A disciple might wishfully hope that, though he be rejected, misunderstood and reviled for his new-found faith by society, yet surely his own family would understand. But McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 94) correctly feels the psychological impact of Jesus' statement:

When a man abandons the religion of his ancestors his own kindred feel more keenly than others the shame which the world attaches to the act, and are exasperated against the supposed apostate in a degree proportionate to their nearness to him.

Jesus is not, however, promoting here a method of missions, whereby He would be seen as deliberately extracting the individual from his

people and home in order to become a disciple, ignoring, and thereby failing to retain the friendly relations whereby the family and eventually much of his former society could be won to the Lord. Even within the highly individualistic framework of Jesus' warning it may yet be possible to attain the intriguing ideals of a "People's Movement Christward," as urged and described by McGavran (*The Bridges of God*), wherein a chain-reaction of individual decisions to accept Christ makes it possible for larger segments of a given human community to move whole from paganism or Judaism into the new faith in Christ. Thus individuals are able to make decisions within this larger community change of faith. But while Jesus is not discussing a method of missions, yet He is talking about the necessary expectations that any given disciple of His must confront due to his own painfully individualistic allegiance to Him. While McGavran's thesis is ideally suited to making possible the wider and more rapid evangelization of a people, yet the major obstacle to such a movement is "ostracism, a people's defense against any new thing felt seriously to endanger the community life. . . . The most successful answer to ostracism is the conversion of chains of families. The lone convert is particularly susceptible to boycott." (*Bridges*, 20). But this is just Jesus' point. To this, McGavran answers (*Bridges*, 23):

Yet becoming a Christian also meant leaving relatives. Every such decision involved separation from those not yet convinced. . . . What produced this dividing force was not merely individual conviction. It was individual conviction heated hot in a glowing group movement in a human chain reaction. Very few individuals standing alone could renounce father and mother and kinsmen. But reinforced by the burning faith that *our people are following the new way*, such fathers and mothers and kinsmen as refused to follow the Messiah could be renounced. There were heartbreaks and tears, the parting was tremendously difficult, but to men borne forward on the way of group action it was possible.

This may be true where the wave of group action is already rolling high, but where it is not, where the evangelization has just begun, or where an apostate Church is the majority religion or the State Church, the disciple of Jesus is to expect social intercourse to be cut off so drastically that no one will give the new convert warmth, shelter or support. If he falls sick, he can expect his former associates to have nothing to do with him, since, for all

they care, he can die. It is very easy to overstate our evidence for the rapid, people-wide growth of the Church during the early days of its history. (Ac. 2:41-47; 4:4, 32ff.; 6:1, 7; 8:6, 12; 9:35, 42; 11:19-26; 21:20) Though it be true that the Christian Church was a movement of great numbers, so that a large enough segment of the Jewish people became Christian with the consequence that whole families and sometimes whole villages turned to the Lord (cf. Ac. 9:35), nevertheless the validity of Christ's words here in this text was demonstrated time and again as the ostracism rose right within the ranks of the Jewish people itself. The horrible persecution of the Church by the Jewish religious establishment was not the only frightening prospect confronted by early converts from Jewry. (Cf. Ac. 4; 5:17-42; 6:8—8:4) They lost family, possessions, connections, honors and opportunities. (Cf. Heb. 10:32-34; Mt. 19:29) The rapid people-movement was not at all trouble-free, so as to make Christ's warning here unnecessary. In fairness to McGavran, it must be said that he is not saying that had the Apostles used the techniques he outlines, the transfer from Judaism to Christianity would have been much smoother. Nor does he minimize the inevitable banishment of the Christian from intimate society of the unconverted relatives or associates, since his real antithesis is a method of missions too often used, which mistakes Jesus' warning in our text for the norm, hence ignores important relationships within a people that could be used advantageously to produce much more rapid evangelization of that people. Let it never be said that Jesus is urging *variance against* one's family for variance' sake, but rather *variance* for Jesus' sake. Jesus is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance. (Lk. 13:1-9; 2 Pe. 3:9) Any disciple who has learned this cannot deliberately seek to alienate his family merely by some indiscretion thought to be "showing faithfulness to Jesus."

On the other hand, there is the keen temptation, described by Barclay, (*Matthew*, I, 406):

The bitterest thing about this warfare was that a man's foes would be those of his own household. It can happen that a man loves his wife and his family so much that he may refuse some great adventure, some avenue of service, some call to sacrifice, either because he does not wish to leave them, or because to accept it would involve them in danger and in risk. . . . It has happened that a man has refused God's call to some adventurous bit of service, because he allowed personal attachments to immobilize him. . . . The

fact remains that it is possible for man's loved ones to become in effect his enemies, if the thought of them keeps him from doing what he knows God wishes and wants him to do.

10:36 A man's foes shall be they of his own household.

McGarvey (*Fourfold*, 367) observes:

If the Jew and the pagan thus held *their* religions at a higher value than the ties of kindred (so as to persecute their Christian kin, HEF), much more should the Christian value his religion above these ties.

Even so, we must never forget that our real enemy is always and only Satan, even though he may make good use of an unknowing and unwilling tool in the person of one's own kin to do his work. (Sometimes he adopts an unsuspecting Christian to his purpose to destroy the Church from within. Is it not possible that Jesus has sometimes reflected: "What do I need enemies for, when I have disciples like that one?") But the disciple must ever recall that **they of one's own household** are never the ultimate enemy, but PEOPLE, even though they are blinded by bitter religious hate. These are people for whom Jesus came to die, just as much as are those who do accept Him. This is the reason why the disciples are never to respond with vitriolic invectives against the opposition. Perhaps the very meekness and consideration and constancy of Jesus' disciples will be the very means of opening the mind of the opponents to the truth. (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:1, 2) Paradoxically, they are **foes** in one sense, but beloved in another. (Cf. Ro. 11:28)

**D. THE SECRET OF SUCCESS THROUGH SACRIFICE
AND SURRENDER TO THE SAVIOR (10:37-39)**

Fully knowing that many are willing to endure almost anything "in death or life, in the realm of spirits or earthly monarchs, in the world of what happens today or in the world tomorrow, in the forces of the universe, of heaven or hell," the Lord now pictures that one influence that would be able to seduce them away from Him. He knows the danger to be found in the tender tension in families where natural affection would prove stronger than our chosen affection for Christ.

10:37 He that loveth (*ho philôn*, not *ho agapôn*) Before beginning the exegesis of Jesus' meaning, it is imperative that we note which words He uses, lest we miss His emphasis, not having

listened to His choice of terms. He is talking about *philia*, not *agapē*. (See notes on 5:43-48, Vol. I, 308-322 for a study of this latter word.) The master has in mind, not that invincible good will that always does what is in the best interest of the object of one's love, even if the person thus loved remains disagreeable or becomes the enemy. Rather, He puts the emphasis on *philia* (= "friendship"; in this connection examine Jas. 4:4 where this noun appears the only time in the N.T.) *Philéō*, while having some of the same area of meaning as *agapāō*, is better understood to touch more deeply the sentiments or emotional attachment of the individual and should be translated "love, have affection for, like, . . . kiss." (Arndt-Gingrich, 866f.) The Lord, then, is talking about cherishing what is dear to us at the expense of our loyalty to Him

He that loveth father, mother, son or daughter more than me: this is no question of our relative affection for that individual, as if we must somehow diminish our affection for each individual, in order to have sufficient affection left over for Jesus. Rather, He means the *whole* of our affection for any individual, which conflicts with the *whole* of our affection for Jesus. This is psychologically sound, for every one of us is capable of indefinite affection for each person we know, should we feel inclined so to express ourselves. Jesus does not ask that we diminish any affection we have for any person, least of all for those of our own family. He is, rather, proscribing that conflict of loyalty that prefers our selfish, unbelieving family, to His claims on the life of His disciple caught at that crisis of choice between the two.

What makes this a hard saying of Jesus is its antithesis, stated on a later occasion (Lk. 14:26, 33):

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

This is not only difficult for most to accept, but seems to make "hate" the antithesis of "affection," as we have it in Matthew's text. But the incisive writing of C. S. Lewis (*Four Loves*, 17ff., 166ff.) puts these seemingly contradictory maxims of the Lord into their proper relationship. Loving anything or anyone above God Himself, is to make an idol of the object of our love. So when our loves claim or will or would hold us back from following Him, then

we must take them from the throne of our heart, even though our decision will seem to them sufficiently like hatred. Lewis is right, of course, but this is where the difficulty arises, since most people who become disciples of Jesus, do so full-grown with a rather completely developed circle of friends, relatives and loved ones, a relationship already very strong and of long duration. Jesus' seemingly harsh (and only apparently contradictory) demands require that we put our loves into their proper order, long in advance of crises, so that when the test comes, it will be no brutal surprise to anyone. Lewis goes on to point out that it is absolutely essential that all who know us should also know, from a thousand talks, exactly what we are and how we feel about God. This helps all our loved ones to set their lives in order psychologically in relation to us, to come to understand us on this matter of our commitment to Christ, long before the crucial test of loyalty. When the crisis arises it is too late to begin telling a loved one that our love had a secret reservation all along, i.e., our commitment to the Master. It is precisely at this point that Jesus' demands for the widest and most public confession of our adherence to Him, begin to make sense in a personal way. (See on 10:26, 27, 32, 33)

There is very keen refinement in this temptation to deny Christ because of some loved one! When we see that our attachment to Him will cause danger or death to some loved one, we hesitate to jeopardize their life or safety by taking that conscious step that would throw them into exactly that position. What should we do at that moment? We must have already learned that, with us or without us, they remain in God's care, just as much as they ever were before we came along. In that moment then, let us commit them to Him. Even if our confession or our taking a special stand for Christ brings them pain or death (because of what others do to them as a direct result of our own faithfulness), it must not deter us from taking that stand or making that confession. Every loyalty must give place to loyalty to God. Peter calls persecution a "refining fire" (1 Pet. 1:6-8), because it burns out of our attachment to Jesus all the impure motives. These trials make us examine every phase of our faith for which we are called upon to suffer. We will not willingly suffer for what we do not deem absolutely essential. Thus we examine even these closest, dearest relationships in the light of their eternal consequences. Sentiment and affection had, in better times, covered up these implications, not permitting us to evaluate them objectively. This is why Jesus unsparingly strips

off that protective covering of sentiment and rigorously bares the extreme danger that these loved ones can be to us.

He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter more than me . . . The Lord knows the extraordinary seduction that material possessions can be, and in no uncertain terms requires that a disciple be ready to relinquish his hold on ANY possession. (Cf. Mt. 19:16-30; Lk. 14:25-33; cf. Phil. 3:7) But here the Master decrees that those human relationships which we deem most truly real and valuable and would hold as most intrinsically our own, must be sacrificed, if they prove to be **more than me!** Any Christian who acknowledges a higher lordship than Jesus Christ, is not fit for the Kingdom of God. (Cf. Jn. 8:31-34; Ro. 6:16; Lk. 9:62) There can be no prior or unbreakable commitments to any other, if Jesus be Lord.

Worthy of me. But who could pretend to be actually **worthy of Jesus?** (Cf. 2 Co. 2:16) No one can stack up merits or earn credits with God, merely by accumulating any number of good deeds to be remembered in a ledger of merit. (Cf. Col. 1:12, 13; 2 Co. 3:5, 6; Jn. 15:5) Arndt-Gingrich (77) translate it: "He does not deserve to belong to me," or perhaps, "he is not suited to me." **Worthy of me**, however, is the disciple's goal, because it describes a manner of life that would be a credit to Jesus. Living **worthy of Him** means having that same intransigence before temptations, that same love of righteousness, that same mercifulness with sinners, that same patience under trial, that reflects so well what He would have done under similar circumstances. Bystanders could see in their mind's eye and remember Jesus, precisely because they would be able to see His attitudes and actions duplicated in His people.

10:38 **And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me.** Whereas before, Jesus had presented influences that perhaps could have allured us away from Him, here He unmasks the one that would repel us from Him: the suffering of shame and death. Rather than speak of crowns and glory to these disciples who were expecting any day to participate in a glorious messianic procession that would signal the beginning of the messianic kingdom, Jesus flashes before the startled Apostles a vision of the real procession in which they will march, a vision as shocking as it is terrible. To appreciate the spectacle Jesus' words convey, imagine the Lord, with His own cross on His shoulders, waving His men on up Golgotha's height, shouting, "Come on, it's over the top we go—do you expect to live forever?"

How many times had these very men witnessed a straggling line of condemned Galileans shuffling along to their tortured death, bearing their crosses, hurried along by Roman guards? How often had these men watched the death agony of human beings nailed to those wooden trees while their pain, thirst and anger mingled with blood, sweat and flies in the hot Palestine sun? The Roman general, Quintilius Varus, quelled the uprisings Simon and Judas, and crucified 2000 Jews that had supported these insurrections in Galilee. He lined the roads of Galilee with these gruesome markers. To the Apostles, then, Jesus' challenge put in these words is no less than the demand that they pronounce and execute the death sentence upon themselves. Any astute political observer or sociologist who had listened to Jesus very long could have observed that anyone who took Jesus seriously enough to enlist in His movement would be committing political, religious and commercial suicide. And Jesus would agree. This is why the Master, at this point in their discipleship, requires that His men finish the funeral, so they can get on with more important things.

The genius of such a requirement is immediately obvious: no enemy can, through threats of death, stop a revolutionary movement made up of men and women who have already accepted their own death as an accomplished fact, a justified judgment and a willing surrender! (Cf. Ro. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14, 17). The disciple is to see that there are two ways of obeying the will of Christ:

1. Actively, by doing what He has bound us to say and do, whereinsofar we are free to do it, i.e. so long as others permit us to express our commitment to Christ.
2. Passively, by suffering the opposition, the persecution and martyrdom at the hands of those who do not permit us to do His bidding in any other way. (Phil. 1:29)

But already the literal cross has passed from a means of physical execution, into that figurative, spiritual reality that all Christian theology has come to recognize. Anyone who has signed his own death warrant by accepting the risk of losing all for Jesus, even his own life on a wooden stake along a public highway, has already begun to arrange his life spiritually in the very direction Jesus intends. (See on Mt. 16:24-28) The cross is painfully personal and must be willingly assumed, since no other can either shoulder it for us or even lay it on our shoulders. Each must **take his cross**, i.e. do what he must for Christ's sake, even at the price of the most heartbreaking

sacrifices or the most excruciating death. This is precisely what doing the will of God cost Jesus.

This willing self-crucifixion of our own will, emotions, ambitions and desires means, as Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 408) says:

The Christian many have to sacrifice his personal ambitions, the ease and comfort that he might have enjoyed, the career he might have achieved; he may have to lay aside his dreams, to realize that the shining things of which he caught a glimpse are not for him. He will certainly have to sacrifice his will, for no Christian can ever again do what he likes: he must do what Christ likes.

The impressive list Jesus had already given explained the various ramifications of the cross, as suffering:

1. being dragged before hostile religious and civil authorities (17)
2. receiving an inhospitable reception when trying to bring the Gospel of peace to others (v. 14)
3. being betrayed to death by relatives (v. 21)
4. being tempted to fear men more than God (v. 28)
5. facing the constant allurements of denying everything just to have a moment's peace (v. 33)
6. slander that tears at the heart (v. 25)

There is another reason for this drastic demand as part of this commission of the Twelve as Jesus sends them out on their first trial run. How badly they needed this special teaching regarding the cross in their own future, is seen in the fact that they have studied under Jesus many months now. They have just enough training to make them cocksure but not great rabbis. They have every temptation now to "out-pharisee the Pharisees," i.e. to be proud, sectarian, more argumentative than convincing, more self-seeking than useful to others. They will be tempted to defend themselves instead of preach the Gospel. To them these words may well mean:

- He who loves his own opinions, his own group more than me, is not worthy of me.
- No man is worthy of me who prides himself in his debating ability, forgetting that his opponents are people for whom I came to die, forgetting his great responsibility to make the truth known in love, forgetting that people can be changed if they are not battered into the ground.
- He who confuses opposition raised by honest doubters for bitter persecution is not worthy of me.

- He that confuses his own interests for mine, thinking that those who oppose him, for whatever reason, are thereby opposing me, is not worthy of me.
- He who knows he is right and remains uncompromising, but is unkind to those yet in the wrong, is unworthy of me.
- He who deceives himself into thinking he is standing for me, when actually he has never taken the trouble to study both sides of an issue so he will have responsible reasons for what he believes to be my meaning, or when he has made his conclusion out of selfish or deceptive motives, is not worthy of me.

**10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it;
and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find
it.**

The key to this paradox is the definition and importance one puts upon **his life**. **Life** (*psychē*) is a many-sided word, a fact which may create problems for all who would understand and decide aright in which way they wish to preserve their life. Arndt-Gingrich (901, 902) define *psychē*:

1. literally—*a.* of life on earth in its external, physical aspects . . . (*breath of*) *life, life-principle, soul* . . . *earthly life* itself . . . *b.* *the soul* as seat and center of the inner life of man in its many and varied aspects . . . *c.* *the soul* as seat and center of life that transcends the earthly . . . *d.* Since the soul is the center of both the earthly (1a) and the supernatural (1c) life, a man can find himself facing the question in which character he wishes to preserve it for himself . . . Mk. 8:35. Cf. Mt. 10:39; 16:25; Lk. 9:24; 17:33; Jn. 12:25 . . .
2. by metonymy *that which possesses life or a soul* . . . *a living creature* . . . Pl. *persons, lit. souls* . . .

What is the real meaning, purpose and value of life? This question, the most practical search of the philosopher and the inevitable object of every thinking person, is here categorically answered by the Lord: "Life is losing oneself in the unselfish service of someone else." This simple declaration becomes, then, the acid test of our appreciation of, and submission to, Jesus' Lordship and wisdom. The disciple who disagrees with this fundamental principle of Jesus, either by what he thinks or by the way he runs his life, is in reality

no disciple, regardless of all his pretensions to the contrary! Feel the contrast:

What men call "Life:"

- The selfish struggle to satisfy self; self-glorification;
- The praise of other men is the most satisfying goal;
- A constantly growing supply of wealth and possessions;
- That eager grasping after more pleasures, adventures, excitement, comfort, ease, security;
- Fulfillment of ambitions;
- Hoarding life by denying one's commitment to Jesus.

What God calls "Life:"

- Doing what needs to be done, regardless of personal comfort or costs.
- Praise of God one's highest joy.
- Losing oneself in humble, self-effacing service to God and men.
- Surrendering one's selfish, self-seeking life.
- Spending, not hoarding, one's powers, interest, possessions.
- Honorable, unflinching confession of Jesus, though it brings certain suffering and death.

Note the judgment Jesus pronounces upon each way of *life*:

- He shall lose all that real life involves.
- He quit too early, satisfying himself too easily with that which is a mere substitute for life as it is meant to be lived.
- The man who makes this life the end-all of his existence, really fails the more he seems to succeed.
- He loses all that makes this life valuable to others and worth living for himself.
- He must face the second death!
- He gains all the real life that Christ's leading promises and produces.
- He gains a place in human history and human hearts accorded the truly great who humbly served others.
- The man who looks with unwavering confidence to the faithfulness of God, really succeeds the more he seems to fail (by worldly standards).
- He finds all that makes life valuable to others and makes it worth living for himself.
- He has passed out of death into *life!*

The tragedy of the self-seeking, self-saving life is already pronounced by Jesus who knows its certain outcome: such a person **shall lose his life**. There is no doubt or discussion: such a course is already doomed. He who tries to save his life, his marriage, his property,

his position or anything else that is important to him at the expense of his commitment to Christ, loses it all. (Cf. Jn. 12:42, 43) This principle is so far-reaching that even Jesus Himself could not escape it! (Jn. 12:24, 25) This is why He lays down the challenge of high adventure: He knows that the only way to true happiness and real life, here and hereafter, is to SPEND life, not sparing it, but serving others and so fulfilling God's purpose for us here. (See notes on 5:43-48; 7:12, Vol. I)

He that loseth his life for my sake is not necessarily, although he certainly could be, a Christian martyr. (Cf. Rev. 21:11) Obviously a person could not **take up his cross daily**, if this meant martyrdom the first time around! A violent death is not to be preferred to a humble, self-denying life of daily service so intent on ministering to others that one's own selfish ambitions dwindle and die from neglect. This is the real loss of one's life for Jesus' sake. Imagine the puzzlement of the solicitous and selfish: "But you don't have time for yourself any more!" To this the saint responds: "Really, I had not noticed, but, frankly, if you knew what a scoundrel I am, you would not have time for me either!"

Shall find it. There is no faith where there is no risk. In this exalted promise of a proven gentleman, Jesus turns up to their maximum the test fires that try men's faith. From this point on, every one of Jesus' listeners must decide personally whether He knows what He is talking about, whether HIS world is real. Jesus' promises test a man's faith just as really as do His most exacting commands.

For my sake: this is the secret of Christ's power over men, the key to His ability to transform men from the self-seeking, self-complacent, self-willed, ambitious rebels they are, into saints of God. Once a man comprehends clearly who Jesus is and what He has done for that one man, once that man desires to respond in gratitude for Jesus' self-humiliation on the cross, there is no end to what that man will do *for Jesus' sake*. (See notes on 5:11, Vol. I, 226) But the secret is our commitment, not to a system nor a doctrine nor even a way of looking at religion, but our sense of belonging to Him. (1 Pet. 2:20-25) Plummer (*Matthew*, 157) calls our attention to the audacity of Jesus' demands and claims:

Again we have a claim which is monstrous if He who makes it is not conscious of being Divine. Who is it that is going to own us or renounce us before God's judgment-seat (32, 33)? Who is it that promises with such confidence that the man who loses his life for His sake shall find it?

And these momentous utterances are spoken as if the Speaker had no shadow of doubt as to their truth, and as if He expected that His hearers would at once accept them. What is more, thousands of Christians, generation after generation, have shaped their lives by them and have proved their truth by repeated experience .

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List several instances in which disciples of Jesus actually denied Him before men.
2. List several instances in which disciples of Jesus actually confessed Him before men .
3. List several instances in which disciples actually felt the sword of Jesus in their own lives, as their loyalty to the Master cost them their family, friends, position, comfort, wealth or the like.
4. Illustrate from instances in Jesus' life how He personally underwent all the difficulties that He here pictures for His disciples. Leave out the trials of the last week of His life and the crucifixion. Search out other poignant illustrations of His personal suffering many, many times before that last week.
5. Explain the meaning of the terms: "peace on the earth" and "sword" as Jesus intended them in this text. Show how this use differs from some usual connotations of these words.
6. When and where will Jesus confess or deny men before His Father?
7. Show the deeper harmony between the ancient prophecy that describes a part of Jesus' mission to be the Prince of Peace, and the overt declaration of Jesus Himself that He did not intend to bring peace on earth.
8. Explain the remark Jesus made about "finding and losing one's life." What is this "life" to which He refers?
9. Explain the meaning of the expression "to take up one's cross." Show what this expression would have impressed on the minds of the Apostles who first heard it, and then state as well as you can the same meaning in modern English without any loss in significance or flavor that Jesus intended.
10. Explain how Jesus' disciples are to be "worthy of" Him.
11. What is the content of the confession that Jesus requires of His disciples to make before men? In other words, what are we to

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say about Jesus that makes all the difference between confessing Him and denying Him?

12. State the declarations in this section that emphasize Jesus' authority.

SERMON

ON SELF-DENIAL AND
CROSS-BEARING:

"THE INFLUENCE OF THE CROSS IN THE
LIFE OF THE BELIEVER"

TEXT: MT. 10:38

Introduction: The very word "cross" immediately evokes the image of the instrument of torture on which Jesus died. However in the NT at least one fourth of the references to the cross (6 in 27) do not refer to His cross at all, but rather to the cross of every believer. (Mt. 10:38; 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23; 14:27; Gal. 6:14) But how does the cross involve the life of every Christian? To answer this question, we need to see:

I. The MEANING of the Cross in the Life of the Believer.

A. This is not simply, or only, martyrdom, a literal death on the cross.

1. This is obvious from the fact that Jesus Himself at the moment He uttered this challenge apparently did not expect any disciple to comply literally with the command.

a. Therefore, the "cross" is figurative.

b. But, though figurative, this cannot mean it is somehow less real.

c. In fact, it is something so very real that our whole discipleship and consequent salvation depends upon it! (Lk. 14:27)

2. Nor can it mean merely martyrdom, because Jesus expected all true disciples to comply immediately as if it were a matter of life and death.

a. This is true, even though some disciples, who were acceptable to the Lord, never tasted martyrdom and

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yet they may be presumed to have borne their "cross" worthily.

- b. Some disciples who were standing there immediately present did not suffer martyrdom for several years and yet may be presumed to have begun bearing their cross shortly after the Lord said this, and for some time until their death.
 - c. If the *cross* must be taken literally or legalistically, what do we do with those poor souls who died by decapitation, by being boiled alive or burned at the stake? Though these did not die on the cross, should it be deduced from this that they did not somehow "bear their cross" worthily?
- B. Nor is bearing one's cross simply the sum total of the pains and difficulties that assault the disciple throughout life.
1. The Lord does not take notice of the size of the callouses on our hands. He looks rather at how we earned them.
 2. There are large numbers of people who suffer greatly without intending for one minute to bear any kind of cross: as far as they are concerned, their suffering has nothing to do with Jesus, since they have no connection with Him.
 3. So the cross is not simply the normal suffering in life.
- C. The true meaning of the cross is our imitation of, and identification with, Jesus, i.e. our assuming the same attitudes He manifested throughout His life.
1. The cross probably has the same meaning in the life of the disciple as it had for the life of his Master. (Mt. 10:24, 25; Heb. 13:24, 25)
 2. Jesus had already felt the effects of the cross for the entire 33 years that preceded that mortal crisis that took place on Golgotha. (Heb. 2:18; 4:15)
 3. All of the temptations Jesus faced and defeated are evidences of His conquest of His ego, the victory over His selfish passions.
 4. So the meaning of cross-bearing and the nature of self-denial is putting to death in our lives all that:
 - a. hinders fellowship with our God;
 - b. harms relations with our fellowman;
 - c. holds self apart for self alone.
- D. Having understood the meaning of the cross, we are driven to look into . . .

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II. The NECESSITY of the Cross in the Life of the Believer:

- A. In order to solve society's deepest problem, man's own beastly selfishness, the cross is necessary.
 1. Self-denial is absolutely essential to the well-being of society in all its relationships, since it is the key to the removal of selfishness, the root of all of society's problems.
 2. It is the voluntary placing ourselves at the service of others AS IF we were their inferiors, even though in many cases we are their superiors (and too often we think we are when we are not!). Examples: parent/child; student/professor; employer/employee; government/citizens; merchant/customer; elders/younger.
- B. To be able to fulfil the very spirit of Jesus' ideals, the cross is necessary.
 1. The faith Jesus taught requires not only a belief in His doctrine or an intellectual adherence to His ideals.
 2. Rather, He demands that conquest of the ego, that total defeat of self.
 - a. This is something much more difficult, much more profound than a superficial assent to a new creed, however well-stated, convenient but innocuous.
 - b. This is, rather, the willing execution of that rebel who would kick God off His throne, and seat himself in His place, ruling his own little universe.
 - c. This self-renunciation is more basic than that external conformity to a new, however superficial, set of ideals.
 - d. This is literally starting over, because Jesus wants to change the man from within by making him a new creature!
 3. Jesus knows how impossible it is to require that the old man, in his present condition, reach those ideals which are absolutely necessary and obligatory to please God, and live lives worthy of sons of God.
 - a. Law, any law, could require a certain external conformity to certain norms, but it could not touch the heart, could not require that a man think or feel rightly.
 - b. For this result, it is necessary to begin again by creating the new man from within.
 - c. The result? In this way alone can we reach the spirit, not only the form, of the ideals of Jesus.

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C. To be ABLE to put Jesus' ideals into practice, the cross is necessary:

1. So long as that rebel remains alive, so long will Jesus' ideals be impracticable, unreachable.
2. It is when man throws down his last line of defense that barricades him against his God, when he lays himself bare to the righteous sentence of death against him, without justifications or excuses, when he DIES, only then can that new man rise in him, created in the image of Jesus. Only then is he able to be the man that, in his dreams, he might have been.

D. The cross is necessary in order to be able to ENJOY Christianity:

1. The cross rudely puts an end to that desperate clinging to two worlds, trying to grasp the best of both, but fails to win either, since he who tries it is unable, because unwilling, to pay the price and accept the discipline required to gain them. Consequently, the man who tries it remains in the middle, half-way between both worlds, deluded, frustrated, unable to reach either. So he loses the best of both.
2. But the cross, having put to death, put to silence the selfish cries of the old mad fool, leaves the man with his heart whole, his mind sane, his life and desires united. With one heart, undivided by contradictory claims on his attention, the man can by the grace of God confidently reach for all the fullest joys to be had in Christ's service here on earth and all the best of heaven!

E. The cross is necessary in order to be able to hold out to the end.

1. The man who has already accepted his own death as
 - a. a past fact;
 - b. a victory for true justice;
 - c. a justified execution of a notorious criminal;
 - d. and a voluntary surrender of himself to God,cannot have much sympathy with those temptations that would turn him back into the wretch he used to be.
2. Such a man cannot count his earthly life as dear to him, whether his persecutors would make it miserable for him or his tormenters would take it from him.

F. This helps us to appreciate . . .

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III. The REASONABLENESS of the Cross in the Life of the Believer:

A. In relationship to God's character:

1. The death of the rebel is in perfect harmony with the solemn holiness of a just God whose righteousness has been offended.
2. He who has known something of the holiness of God could not seriously object to the capital punishment of anyone who would dare shake his puny, grimy fist at the Almighty.
3. Above all, His permission to cancel that old rebel in us and start all over is an act of pure grace and generous love!

B. In relation to our social relations with one another.

1. When selfishness is dead, where love is alive, we have nothing short of heaven on earth! (Ro. 13:8-10)
2. This freely chosen renunciation of our own selfish desires in favor of the needs of another, automatically brings about that gentle courtesy, that thoughtfulness, that helpfulness that smooths out all our associations with others. (Ro. 15:1-7)

C. In relation to our own final destiny:

1. The Lord is training us, disciplining us, for a position, an eternity of infinite value and dignity. (Heb. 12:1-11)
 - a. Every time, therefore, that we succeed in doing the unselfish deed, we create in this way our own character.
 - b. Every time we fall again into selfish ways of thinking or acting, the Lord can help us to rise again and try it once more.
2. Our character, acquired in this way, accompanies us in death and right on through the resurrection. Nothing is ever lost of this discipline of the cross.

CONCLUSION: Let us affirm with the Apostle Paul Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14.

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

V. JESUS REWARDS THOSE WHO WELCOME HIS SERVANTS

TEXT: 10:40-42

A. THE AUTHORITY OF HIS MESSENGERS

40. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

B. THE REWARD TO THOSE WHO HELP
JESUS' MESSENGERS

41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.
42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. According to Jesus, of what importance to the Galileans were the apostles and the apostles' word? Is their word of the same degree of importance to us today as then?
- b. What principle do you see behind the expression: "He that receives you, receives me, etc."?
- c. Can you provide a reason why Jesus should put so much value upon even the smallest service rendered to the lowliest disciple of His?
- d. Do you see a descending order of importance in the persons mentioned by Jesus: Apostles ("you"), "prophet," "righteous man," "one of these little ones"? If so, what do you think is Jesus' intention for putting these persons in this descending scale? If you do not see these four persons as a whole group, but as individuals, then what is Jesus' intentions regarding the importance of each?
- e. I thought we were saved by grace without meriting or earning what is coming to us. How can Jesus here speak of "rewards" or "wages"?
- f. Are there messengers of God today, who although not Apostles themselves, yet bring the Apostles' doctrine and so deserve for their work's sake to be helped? Who are they? How should they be helped?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"But what about those people, those cities and villages, that welcome you and joyfully listen to your message? Those who receive you Apostles, in reality, are accepting me. Consequently, when they accept my message, mission and ministry, in reality they are accepting God's design and purpose. If you receive a prophet of God just because you see him as a man of God, you will receive the same reward a prophet gets. If you welcome and help a good man, because of your love for righteousness, you will receive a reward that goes to a good man. The most insignificant of my men is still my disciple, and whoever gives him just a drink of cool water on a hot day, just because they recognize that he is in my service, I Jesus, appreciate it! And I can tell you, that whoever does even a little thing like that for one of my disciples however lowly, he shall never—and I mean NEVER—lose the wage coming to him!"

SUMMARY

Jesus promised God's unfailing rewards for all who honor God by accepting and helping His servants, whether that servant be an Apostle, a Prophet, a good man or even the most insignificant of Jesus' followers.

NOTES

If it be true that Jesus has addressed Himself first to the immediate needs of the Apostles during their early Galilean ministry (10:5-15), then to their ministry before the unbelieving Jewish nation and some before the Gentiles (10:16-23), then to the disciples' program and problems of all times, as suggested in the introduction to the chapter, then we should ask the following questions about this section, before proceeding to interpret it:

1. Is this concluding section intended as a summary conclusion to the last section only, i.e. to that section which immediately precedes it?
2. Or is this conclusion intended to summarize this whole ordination sermon, hence applicable only to those Apostles thus ordained?
3. Or is this conclusion a fitting end to the entire discourse, encompassing in its scope both the special, authoritative ministry of the Apostles, as well as the general, day-to-day

service for Jesus performed by the most insignificant of His disciples?

This latter view seems most in harmony with the passage itself (10:40-42) which pictures three different expressions of Jesus in the world: His Apostles ("you," v. 40), His "prophets and righteous men," (v. 41), and His "little ones, disciples" (v. 42). Even if we eliminate the second group for reasons mentioned below, we still retain the two fundamentally separate groups, the divinely-inspired spokesmen and the rest of the Church.

A. THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE (10:40)

10:40 **He that receiveth you.** This is a ray of sunshine after the many stormy warnings of persecution, death and judgment. Jesus ends His discourse on a positive note, not only because it is psychologically sound to do so, but because He knew, and expected the Apostles to know, that there WOULD be people everywhere who DO respond to God's love and accept His messengers. (Cf. 1 Th. 1:5-10; 2:15) What assurance this brings to Apostles and other Christian workers embarking upon world revolution, barely aware of the giant forces that they must meet and defeat! Who would NOT go forth into Galilee, nay, into the whole world, to serve such a far-seeing, thoughtful Master on terms like these?

Receive has a special, triple impact here:

1. Normal hospitality. (Ro. 16:23; Heb. 13:1-3; Tit. 3:12-14; Philemon 22) But this meaning rapidly fades into the next for reasons obviously related to our text:
2. Reception, aid and hospitality because the guest, the person helped, is in the special service of Christ. (Ac. 16:15; Ro. 16:2; 1 Co. 16:10, 11, 15-18; 3 Jn. 5-8. Note the antithesis of this reception: Ro. 16:17, 18; 2 Jn. 7:11.)
3. Giving heed to the messenger, welcoming him and his message, as it were, God Himself. (Gal. 4:14; 1 Th. 2:13)

Considering the progressive degree of openness required by each of the above expressions of hospitality, it would seem that something is here revealed about the wisdom of requiring that the Twelve seek out the most hospitable people in a city as they start to evangelize that area. (See on 10:11-14) But though the superior psychological preparation in the hearts of generous men is obvious, still how many ungenerous men can also be won, can also be convinced that the Twelve carry God's message and are to be received as God Himself? How long otherwise does it take before such ungenerousness is converted,

so that it too opens its heart to anyone who comes truly representing Jesus Christ?

But Jesus' emphasis here is not so much on the fact that there would be people who accepted the message, as on the high authority invested in His workers:

He that receiveth you, receiveth me.

and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.

There is no escaping the exact antithesis of these words: "He who rejects you, rejects me; he who rejects me, rejects God! (vv. 14, 15) He who persecutes you, persecutes me!" (Ac. 22:8) In order better to appreciate this close identification of the workers with their God and King, compare Mk. 9:37; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 12:44; 13:20; 17:18; 20:21. The principle is this: a man may be a Judas or a Pharisee, but if he speaks the Word of God, we must listen. (Cf. Mt. 23:2, 3) We do not refuse the telegram just because the messenger who delivers it has some disgusting habit. God holds men responsible for their attitude toward Him and His Word. He does not ask us what we think of the preachers who bring it. This means that anyone who heard Judas the traitor preach—or Peter the denier or Thomas the empiricist or Simon the Nationalist guerilla or Matthew the collaborator with the enemy or John the fisherman—any who heard them preach, heard God! (Cf. 1 Th. 2:13; Gal. 1:12) Either the Apostles have the authority claimed here for them, or they are imposters and Jesus is a liar! There is no middle ground, not even an allowance for "innocent error." It is, of course, assumed here as proved, that the documents bearing us this information are by the hand of the Apostles themselves and that it is with their affirmations that we have to do.

The very general nature of this declaration, as well as the statements of a similar nature spoken of others than the Apostles (Cf. Mt. 18:5; Lk. 9:48), and the previously-noticed general character of the third portion of this discourse, lead us to ask whether this verse even intends to speak of the unique authority of the Twelve. It seems rather to refer to the identification of Jesus' disciples in general with their Lord. If so, the most common disciple who represents Jesus by preaching the Word reported to us by the Apostles, represents God Almighty! Whereas these latter disciples would not, of course, have the direct inspiration of the Spirit to protect their words or presentation from error, as did the Twelve when they originally revealed the Message, yet the man, who stands up in human society and addresses his fellows in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as he presents God's message, is to be heeded as if he were

God Himself in human dress! (See on 10:42) This view harmonizes perfectly with the realization that Jesus is not satisfied until He has turned every one of us into another Jesus Christ ministering in His absence in the very place where we live and work and are best known and can bring the claims of God to bear most personally on the lives of OUR contemporaries. He must not accept a kind of conversion that makes a man somehow as morally perfect as Jesus Himself, but good for nothing! This means that our identification with the Lord must produce in us the same sense of mission that urges us to confess Him openly, declare His rule and demand submission to His wise government.

But, someone will object, does not this latter consideration controvert the supposed apostolic authority defended in the paragraph just preceding it? Not at all, since no early disciple or modern Christian would dare claim that authority belonging only to the Apostles, except insofar as the former's life and message perfectly harmonized with that required by the latter, in which case the real norm is the apostolic doctrine and practice that forms the basis of judgment, not any modern application or interpretation of it. Of importance, by contrast, certainly, are the false claims to apostolic authority made by the so-called "successors of St. Peter" in the Roman papacy or semi-popes in protestant circles or the "apostles" among the sects, such as the Mormons. Their claims may best be tested against the standard established by the Lord's Apostles in their recorded works collected in the NT. At this point the declaration of the Lord is at its strongest: **He that receives you, receives me!** This is not merely comforting encouragement to wavering followers, but an iron-fisted challenge of the orthodoxy of anyone who does not recognize the Apostles and all who bring their message!

We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn. 4:6)

Thus, if we have read this chapter correctly in its larger context of Matthew's book from chapter 4:23 forward, we see that Matthew is endeavoring to say that Jesus of Nazareth is but the extension of God into human affairs (cf. *God with us*, 1:23), the Apostles are but the multiplication of the effectiveness of Jesus as He reaches out into the wider world of men (see on 9:36; 10:1), and the humblest Christian is but the resultant outreach of the ministry of the Apostles themselves. (Cf. Eph. 3:7-10) Thus it is that the Church, even down to her smallest member, is the likeness of God Himself re-

flected among men! Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 410) organizes these relationships as four distinct links in the chain of salvation reaching from God down to needy mankind:

1. God out of whose love the whole process of salvation began.
2. There is Jesus who brought that message to men.
3. There is the human messenger, the prophet who speaks, the good man who is an example, the disciple who learns, who in turn all pass on to others the good news which they themselves have received.
4. There is the believer who welcomes God's men and God's message and who thus finds life to his soul.

B. TWO GENERALLY ADMITTED ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRINCIPLE (10:41)

10:41 **He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.** These are two generally recognized axioms from Jewish life. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 651. Could the reason for this be good examples in Jewish history? cf. 1 Kgs. 17:9-24; 18:4; 2 Kgs. 4:8-10) The Master used them to reinforce His foregoing declaration that any man who opens his life to the Apostles, by that very act is opening his life to God. As before, so here, the emphasis is not so much on the Apostles or the prophets or the righteous men as on *those who receive* them in that character.

Receive, as Barclay (*Matthew*, I, 410) see it, involves providing any kind of help, from even the simplest glass of cold water to a thirsty disciple, to respecting the messenger of his mission from God, as well as everything in between. Jesus is just as much concerned about His "support group" as He is about His "front-line troops." His interest is not only concerned with those non-Christians who sympathize with His people by lending them aid and assistance. He is much more concerned with those unknown disciples of His, who, though not themselves Apostles, prophets or famous righteous men, yet stand solidly behind these great figures in the forefront of the Kingdom. These are people behind the scenes who do everything in their power to make the prophet or righteous man what they are. In the case of each, it may be someone who is never in the public eye at all, but upon whom the prophet is entirely dependent for everyday love, care, sympathy, and

help. The righteous man may be what he is, because there is an otherwise unknown person who is daily encouraging him to be good, building up his life. Jesus affirms that these little-known people are figures well-known to God and will share His heavenly acclaim, that approval usually thought reserved only for those better-known public figures, the "great saints." Again, Barclay observes so practically:

There is many and many a man who has been a great public figure . . . whose voice has kindled the hearts of thousands of people, . . . who has carried an almost intolerable burden of public service and public responsibility, all of whom would have gladly borne witness that they could never have survived the effort and the demands of the task, were it not for the love, care, sympathy and service of someone at home, who was never in the public eye at all. When true greatness is measured up in the sight of God, it will be seen again and again that the man who greatly moved the world was entirely dependent on someone who, as far as the world is concerned, remained unknown. Even the prophet must get his breakfast, and have his clothes attended to; even the prophet must have his home. Let those who have the often thankless task of making a home, cooking meals, washing clothes, shopping for household necessities, caring for children, never think of it as a dreary . . . weary round; it is God's greatest task; and they will be far more likely to receive the prophet's reward than those whose days were filled with committees and whose homes were comfortless. . . . The great beauty of this passage is its stress on simple things. The Church and Christ will always need its great orators, its great shining examples of sainthood, its great teachers, whose names are household words; but the Church and Christ will also always need those in whose homes there is hospitality, on whose hands there is all the service which makes a home and in whose hearts there is the caring which is Christian love; and as Mrs. Browning said, "All service ranks the same with God."

But in what sense are we to understand **prophet** or **righteous man**?

1. *Literally?* According to this view, Jesus would be listing, in more or less descending order, the categories of service in the Kingdom: the Apostles themselves ("you," v. 40),

prophets, then **righteous men** (v. 41), and, least of all, the humblest beginner among the **disciples** of Jesus (v. 42). If this is Jesus' intention, then His argument proceeds from the less to the greater: "If God rewards those who assist the service of the (apparently) least disciples, how much more can He be trusted to reward those who help you to whom I entrust this vastly more important ministry and apostleship?" (See on 10:15) Though this interpretation is good, it does not depend for its effectiveness upon a four-step descending scale, as the following view, which also includes this application, will show.

2. *Proverbially?* It might well be that the **prophet** and **righteous man** are merely two designations for two classes of God-fearing people in the OT period which was coming to an end in the days of Jesus. It could be argued that these two classes are totally inclusive and representative of the Hebrew people inasmuch as they speak of (1) those to whom and (2) for whom the Word of God came. (Cf. Mt 13:17; 23:29-34 — Lk. 11:47-51) Accordingly, Jesus would be saying, "Even as it is commonly believed among us that anyone who opens his house to those whom we regard as great and good men, receives from God a suitable blessing, so I too am putting my humblest disciple on that same level. God will never forget the simplest act of kindness done for MY people in my name!" Thus would He put His own people in the same high plane at which they esteemed the great men of the OT. In this sense, then, Jesus would not be talking about **prophets** or **righteous men** who would live during the Christian dispensation, since He has used them only as a standard of comparison by which the humble Galilean Apostles could value the importance of their own ministry as well as estimate the high preciousness of their care in the eyes of the Father.

This latter view of the matter is probably to be preferred, since it removes at once the question of what consisted a prophet's or a righteous man's **reward**, by leaving both in the realm of an illustration that formed the basis of a comparison. Further, if these two illustrations are exactly that, i.e. proverbial, then we need not go into great detail, searching for the explicit applications to NT prophets and righteous men, since whatever it is that was usually presumed that the benefactor of an OT **prophet** or **righteous man**

would have received, will now fall to those who provide even minimal aid to Jesus' disciple, so great is His estimate of their importance. But WHY are these humble followers so significant? Because to receive any one of them in their character as disciples of JESUS is to welcome Jesus Himself and, ultimately, God.

McGarvey is right in quoting Alford (*Matthew-Mark*, 95) to say that *in the name of a prophet* or *in the name of a righteous man* is a Hebraism meaning "because he is a prophet, righteous man." (See also Edersheim, *Life*, I, 651) To receive such a person in this character or for this reason is a distinct recognition of his relation to God; "and to that extent God is honored by the act." McGarvey sees the antithesis of this phrase as "in the name of humanity, or because the recipient is a human being." Many high-minded souls would render service to a Christian, not because of his attachment to Christ, but merely because they would do it to any human in need as a magnanimous humanitarian gesture. In this case the giver has not been moved to give by the intention to honor God, hence are promised no reward. Jesus is not discussing mere humanitarian gestures, but acts of kindness to disciples BECAUSE THEY ARE DISCIPLES OF JESUS. Motive is all-important.

Plumptre (*PHC*, 243) takes this one step further: "*In the name of . . . for the sake of that which the name connotes—the prophet's work as a messenger of God, the righteousness of which the living righteous man is the concrete example.*" In a very real sense these two qualities were going to be fused into one person as each of the Apostles would soon literally become God's "prophets and righteous men." And those who helped them for what they were, would receive suitable rewards.

He shall receive a prophet's reward . . . a righteous man's reward. Regardless of whether we understand this verse literally or proverbially, it is essential that we understand the teaching on **rewards** (*misthòs*) propounded here and in the following verse. (See the Special Study Introductory to the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, 198-201: "The Reasonableness of the Redeemer's Rewards for Righteousness," since Jesus' meaning in this section is to be harmonized with His views expressed elsewhere.) The problem concerns the degree of strictness with which we interpret **reward**, since our eternal salvation is not a question of **reward** or salary, but of grace. This dilemma is so acute that Lenski (*Matthew*, 421) decides:

This *misthòs* was always one of pure grace, beyond any merit

of their own, as generous as the great Lord God whom they served.

McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 95) agrees: that the reward, whatever it . . . (is) not synonymous with final salvation; for while it is true that in heaven we will have full reward for all the good we do on earth, we will have infinitely more than this, and our admission into heaven is a matter of *grace*, not of reward. So then the promise of the text does not imply the salvation of all that receive a prophet, etc., but simply that he shall be rewarded. If he be a pardoned man, he may receive his reward in heaven; if not, he will receive it only on earth.

There are several facts to notice about this **reward**:

1. Jesus does NOT say precisely what the **reward** will be. In general, it would be "the reward of (worthy of, or coming to) a prophet, a righteous man."
2. Nor does He explain where it will be given, so it could be received many times and long before the judgment, as well as at that time.
3. Its very character must be harmonized with other clear revelation about the nature of God's blessings.

With these facts in mind, it is well to realize that many people would not recognize God's **reward** on earth if He handed it to them, just because it would be something they would not even consider to be a **reward**. Ewen's discussion (*PHC*, 262, 263) is worthy of repetition here:

Two questions suggest themselves to the thoughtful reader of these words: 1. What is a prophet's, a righteous man's reward? 2. No matter what the reward is, is it quite fair and equitable that a man who merely receives a prophet or a righteous man; who, that is, gives shelter and hospitality to them because they are what they are, should get the same reward which those men themselves get? If a man may get a prophet's reward by merely being hospitable to either of them, what is the good of being a prophet or a righteous man?

* * * * *

- I. The Master does not here tell us what is the . . . reward. Yet here must lie the key that will open for us the mystery, . . .
 - A. Did they know already?

- B. Or did the Master tell them before this what it was?
- C. Or were they left to learn the nature and extent of it gradually by the teaching of experience, which, through the help of the Holy Spirit . . . was to develop in them the power of spiritual apprehension and understanding—was to bring all things again to their remembrance, and help them to interpret His teaching aright?

1. I think we must accept this latter as the correct assumption.
2. Our Lord had taught the nature of the . . . reward before this, as after it, but I fear we cannot credit the disciples at this period with having fully grasped it.
3. They partook too largely of the spirit of their race and of their times to rise so early as this to the loftier conception of Christ's kingdom and of the rewards it conferred on those who were of it . . .

II. The whole tenor of our Lord's teaching was to bring out in regard to this matter that a man's wealth lay in himself, not in his belongings, not in his surroundings . . . the prophet's gifts and the righteous man's character.

A. The true reward of the prophet, the only one that really enriches him, is the growing power of seeing more deeply into the things of God, and the growing power of revealing these more and more clearly to men.

B. The true reward of the righteous man is his becoming more righteous still, his finding virtuous principles within him growing stronger, the vicious in their presence becoming weaker, his finding the path of duty before him growing clearer and clearer, and himself more able to walk in it without stumbling.

C. The reward of the one is the growing strength of his character, that of the other the increasing fitness for his office.

III. It is not hard to see why the man who receives the prophet in the name of a prophet, and the righteous man in the name of a righteous man should receive their reward—the same reward as they do.

A. Observe that in the one case the man receives the prophet in the name of a prophet.

1. He receives him because he knows him to be a prophet.
2. This indicates that the man esteems the prophet for the sake of his office, that his sympathy is with him, and that he is interested in his work.

3. He rejoices to hail this stranger, and gladly offers him hospitality, because he is of a kindred spirit to himself.
 4. And what follows? Their intercourse brings to the host the prophet's reward. The host is enriched in his prophetic gifts by his guest's conversation, and truly receives the prophet's reward, shares with him and through him that enlargement of mind and that penetrating spiritual vision which are the richest fruits of his prophetic labors, as well as the power of clothing his thoughts in more accurate and impressive speech.
- B. The other case is similar to this. The righteous man is received in the name of a righteous man; that is, because he is a righteous man. The man who thus receives him has himself the cause of righteousness at heart, and his ready hospitality brings to his table, to his heart, one whose words and example stimulate all his own virtuous aspirations; evoke and strengthen everything that is noble and good in him; bring him, in fact, the reward of the righteous man.

While it is not necessary so drastically to limit the blessings the man of God brings to the home and life of his host, yet Ewen does point out a psychological receptivity that leaves a man open to all that God has to offer, from the best of this earth to the finest eternity God can imagine. Jesus is talking in general terms as He pronounces this blessing upon those whose hearts make them willing to receive the Christians. Hence He does not spell out in detail whether the individual, whose heart was once sufficiently open to God's representatives, would remain so long enough to lay claim to the reward. It is a matter of sad history that many whose lives were once open to the Lord, change their minds, cut the Creator out of their career and ultimately despise the reward He has been trying to offer them, because it was not suited to their perverted tastes or desires.

Plummer (*Matthew*, 158) is right in observing that "the reward is not offered as a motive for action; the motive in each case is love and reverence for the prophet, or righteous man, or disciple, and therefore for Him whose servant he is." This is obvious from the consideration that this promise would not have been heard at all by those who would have helped the Apostles originally, hence could not have moved them to act from selfish or calculating motives. This being true, the promise is to be interpreted as furnishing assurance to the Apostles that God would reward those who received and

helped them. In this sense, it furnishes motivation for the Apostles to trust God to supply their needs on this journey.

C. A SPECIAL APPLICATION (10:42)

10:42 Jesus makes particular use of the foregoing illustrative standard in a startling way: "If you think the prophets and righteous men were important, I tell you that even the most seemingly inconsequential help provided one of these little ones, will be immediately noticed and remembered by God!" Who is **one of these little ones**?

1. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 652) sees in the term a Jewish technical term for those who were "still learning the elements of knowledge, and would by and by grow into 'disciples.'"

2. Plummer (*Matthew*, 158), on the other hand, thinks:

That "little one" was a Rabbinical expression for a disciple, is doubtful. Here it seems to mean that the disciples were people of whom the world would not take much account. In comparison with the Prophets and saints of the OT, they would seem to be very insignificant. And their mission was to be short, probably only a few weeks; so they would have no great opportunity of making a name for themselves. It is possible that everywhere (18:6, 10, 14; Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:2) "one of these little ones" means "one of my disciples."

3. Lenski (*Matthew*, 423) sees the term as relative to other disciples:

Some of the disciples will not be prominent, even as far as faith and works of faith are concerned. Yet they are disciples, and whoever renders them the least service in connection with their discipleship, recognizing that they are believers in Jesus although among the very least, shall have his reward.

Whether taken in comparison with the Teacher, the great of the world or with other disciples, **one of these little ones** is still among Jesus' brethren (cf. Mt. 25:37, 40), and whatever is done for them is done to Him!

A cup of cold water, while it may seem like so small a service to render a tired man on a hot day, yet was most significant because those who gave it to help a Christian were thereby honoring

his Lord. Some, knowing that the man was a disciple of Jesus, rather than offering even this small service would rather spit on the ground in disgust, refusing to give the time of day to "one of those renegades."

Why did the Lord choose this simple example of useful service? He is using an argument proceeding from the least to the greatest, i.e. almost any help is more than this, yet this too is noticed and rewarded by God. How much more, then, anything greater! Lenski (*Matthew*; 423) has it: "It is not the magnitude of the service that determines the size of the reward, but the motive and its appreciation by the Lord." Consider, by contrast, the sad case of the Pharisees (Mt. 6:2) who sought to gain great reward with God and the praise of men by giving public alms. Whereas Jesus declared them already paid in full ("they have their reward"), hence can expect no more, the Savior here affirms that even a cup of cold water given to an otherwise unknown and quite insignificant disciple of Jesus holds great and imperishable reward!

Verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward. Besides introducing this sentence in His solemn style of emphatic affirmation, the Lord uses most emphatic Greek ("in no wise," *ou mē*) to indicate that it is not possible to fail to be rewarded for even this simple act motivated by love and appreciation for Jesus. Anything done for the Master is never insignificant or forgotten by God (Heb. 6:10; 1 Co. 15:58), however remote the benefactor may seem to be from the "right" group, the "right" religious connections or background. (Cf. Mk. 9:38-41!) The Father has no fear, such as we do, that His rewards might go to the wrong people, since He knows that the wrong people would not think of His gifts, His salary, His rewards as being worth much to them. More than one wise man has pointed out that even Heaven itself, to an unregenerate, would be worse than Hell. God's richest rewards can be lavished on the unwilling in this life and still be turned down with the whine: "But I expected something else—I don't want that!" So what is wrong with letting this magnanimous promise of Jesus have its widest application possible, including even many non-Christians? Like King Midas of old, the wicked can turn one of God's finest rewards into a curse upon themselves within five minutes when they get their hands on it, if they even cared that much about it. God's gifts are for people who appreciate *spiritual* rewards. From this realization comes three impressive conclusions:

1. Here is motive for profound confidence in the providence of God, for who could seriously wonder about the care of a

God who takes special note of simple gifts like a cup of cold water only? If He is so concerned with elementary service or help such as this when rendered to His people, could He somehow miss their need for food, clothing, shelter and other needs?

2. Here is motive for deep reverence for God: He knows the hearts not only of those who give because the recipient is a disciple, but He reads the heart of the disciple as well!
3. Here is motive for deep gratitude to God for His magnanimous mercy: He leaves His rewards lying around for anyone to claim, saint and sinner alike. His goodness, even to those who do not appreciate it, surpasses our understanding, even if not our gratitude. (Cf. Ro. 2:4)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain how anyone who accepted the message and ministry of the Apostles, was at the same time accepting the will and mercy of God.
2. Explain the meaning of the expression: "in the name of" as used in this text.
3. What, exactly, is the reward coming to anyone who helps a prophet, righteous man or little one among Jesus' disciples?
4. State the declarations in this section that emphasize Jesus' authority.
5. What two special lessons about God arise out of the declaration that "whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward"?
6. What is the use Jesus makes of the observation that anyone who receives a prophet or righteous man because they are such, will receive a reward commensurate to that of those whom they help? What literary form does this observation take? What is Jesus' purpose for bringing these two figures into His discourse?
7. How is it possible for Jesus to promise rewards from God to just anyone who helps one of His disciples, and, at the same time, have no fear that unworthy people will be blessed wrongly? What is there about the rewards of God that cause them to go unclaimed by people who have earned them?
8. Who is "one of these little ones"?

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE
APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

VI. THE TWELVE APOSTLES DEPART TO
EVANGELIZE (Mark 6:12, 13; Luke 9:6)

Mark 6:12, 13

Luke 9:6

And they went out and preached that *men* should repent.

And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

And they departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss miracles: What various kinds of miracles did Jesus work?
- b. Why were miracles wrought? There were several purposes.
- c. Under what circumstances was Jesus willing or unwilling to perform them?
- d. Discuss Jesus' ability or inability to work them at any time or place. Discuss the disciples' limitation in working miracles.
- e. What conditions did Jesus require before He worked a miracle? Did He always require such conditions?
- f. How did the apostles acquire miracle-working power? When did they receive the Holy Spirit?
- g. What miracles did the apostles work (before the cross) and what means did they use?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

So the disciples scattered all over Galilee, going from village to village, telling the good news and urging men to turn from their sins back to God. They cast out many demons and healed sick people everywhere anointing them with olive oil.

SUMMARY

Village after village felt the increasing influence of Jesus' ministry now as six evangelistic teams plus Jesus Himself evangelized. In effect, the Apostles became just that many more "Jesus Christs" calling Galilee to repentance, proving the authority of their message

by giving that supernatural evidence that only God's messengers could give.

NOTES

THE TRIAL FLIGHT A GREAT SUCCESS

Whatever negative effect may have been made upon the Apostles by the ominous warnings and shocking statements in their ordination sermon, Mark paints their courage in bold letters: **"They went out and preached . . . !"** The Lord's frank message, though not promising very much from a human viewpoint, did not deter any of the Apostles from fulfilling the challenge they had taken up. (It was greed, or perhaps a mistaken nationalism, but not fear, that caused Judas Iscariot to turn traitor.) Positively, these words girded the Apostles for vigorous action, stirred them to attack, and equipped them to reach all the objectives Jesus had outlined. This they did during their first mission in Galilee. And they kept going. And the Church of Jesus Christ today is irrefutable evidence that they were so prepared. Is not the Church, despite all her faults, living proof, not only of God's blessing upon her, but also the concrete demonstration that these Twelve believed, worked, sorrowed, courageously endured and magnificently produced? Even still more amazing is the observation that after the post-ascension prayer meeting (Ac. 1:13, 14), we never hear of more than half of them by name again. But that these men labored, the entire Church's existence is eloquent testimony. The immediateness of their victory stands out in sharp relief against their apparent total lack of qualifications. Barker (*As Matthew Saw the Master*, 34, 35) sensed this:

What hopeless nobodies the twelve disciples were! They were the least promising material Jesus could have picked. Everything was stacked against their ever accomplishing anything. A roll call of nonentities, this aggregation was hardly the type anyone would depend upon, especially for such serious responsibilities as God demands. Among them there was little prestige, wealth, power or education.

So it was Jesus that made the difference. They **KNEW** no message, no lordship, no power, no direction but His. Bruce (*Training*, 99) explains:

The disciples could do no more than proclaim the fact that the kingdom was at hand, and bid men everywhere repent, by way of preparation for its advent. This was really all

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they knew themselves. They did not as yet understand, in the least degree, the doctrine of the cross; they did not even know the nature of the Kingdom. They had, indeed, heard their Master discourse profoundly thereon, but they had not comprehended His words. Their ideas respecting the coming kingdom were nearly as crude and carnal as were those of other Jews, who looked for the restoration of Israel's political independence and temporal prosperity as in the glorious days of old. In one point only were they in advance of current notions: they had learned from John and from Jesus that repentance was necessary in order to citizenship in this kingdom. . . . Far from wondering, therefore, that the preaching program of the disciples was so limited, we are rather tempted to wonder how Christ could trust them to open their mouths at all, even on the one topic of the kingdom.

At this point it is a proper question whether the Apostles understood even this message of Jesus just preached (Mt. 10:1—11:1). If their prejudices were very deep-rooted, regarding the nature of the Kingdom and of the Messiahship of Jesus, how could they have grasped the full import of their own ordination sermon? It may well be that they did not comprehend it perfectly before the facts or the experiences alluded to in the message were fulfilled, even as a prophecy is somewhat unclear prior to its undoubted fulfilment. Bruce (*Training*, 115) shows his usual, sensitive comprehension when he notes:

It was a rare, unexampled discourse, strange to the ears of us moderns, who can hardly imagine such stern requirements being seriously made, not to say exactly complied with. . . . It is a mountain at which we gaze in wonder from a position far below, hardly dreaming of climbing to its summit. Some noble ones, however, have made the arduous ascent; and among these the first place of honor must be assigned to the chosen companions of Jesus.

And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. (Mk. 6:13) . . . healing everywhere. (Lk. 9:6) Does miracle-working power always depend upon the obvious presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to the extent that people may conclude that miracles are a necessary demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence? No, because the Apostles

obviously worked miracles before the official giving of the Holy Spirit. This mission occurred six months at least before Jesus' declaration regarding the Spirit's influence and power in the life of the believer. (Cf. Jn. 7:38, 39) Jesus' authority and power was, of course, that of the Holy Spirit in Him, but in the total absence of any reference to the influence or presence of the Holy Spirit at this point, and in agreement with a specific declaration that Jesus conferred power upon His men (10:1), we must conclude that the power exercised by the Apostles is Jesus' personal working in them. Bruce (*Training*, 99) agrees:

All the miracles wrought by the twelve were really wrought by Jesus Himself, their sole function consisting in making a believing use of His name. This seems to be perfectly understood by all; for the works done by the apostles did not lead the people of Galilee to wonder who they were, but only who and what He was in whose name all these things were done.

Mk. 6:14: "King Herod heard of it; for Jesus' name had become known." See also Mt. 14:1 and Lk. 9:7.

Did the Apostles work miracles after this mission and before Pentecost? Apparently not when they were with Jesus. Peter walked on water, but Jesus was present. Peter fished up a fish with a coin in its mouth, but though Jesus was absent, this was His miracle, not Peter's. Later, the Seventy worked signs and wonders upon commission from Jesus, while away from Him. So also the unknown miracle worker (Mk. 9:38-40). The fact that they did no more than this seems to indicate that they

1. lacked occasion to work miracles,
 - a. either because Jesus was physically present with them,
 - b. or because they were not sent on other missions than those mentioned:
2. or else, when Jesus was absent, they themselves lacked the necessary faith. (Cf. Mt. 17:19, 20)

They anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. What does oil have to do with the Apostles' miracles of healing?

1. Some suggest that the oil was curative, used as medicine. (Cf. Lk. 10:34) But this is not a likely interpretation here, since the purpose of the act of healing was to identify the Apostles as messengers of God, supernaturally accredited by the miracles. The supernaturalness of the healing would

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- certainly be discounted if the oil used were thought, by those upon whom it were used, to be common medicine.
2. Oil was also in personal body comfort, much as hair oils, bath oils, hand and face creams are used today. (Cf. 2 Sam. 12:20; Mt. 6:16, 17; Lk. 7:46) Why would this be significant here? If we assume that the sick person had let these comforts go during the course of his illness, then for him to permit himself to be **anointed with oil** preparatory to going back to normal life, as if the miracle were already worked, this would be a challenge to his faith in the power of the Apostles to heal him. Seeing the sick person's faith thus demonstrated in his willingness to be anointed, the Apostles then healed them supernaturally with no recourse or connection with the oil. Note that Mark seems to separate the two actions: (1) they **anointed with oil . . .** and then they (2) **healed them**, a fact which agrees with this latter conclusion.

Even if the anointing with oil should be seen as a mechanical method more directly connected with the healing than is suggested in this second interpretation, nevertheless the justification for their use of such a method is found in the fact that Jesus Himself used several different "methods," probably to show clearly that the power is not in the method, but in the Lord Himself. (Cf. Jn. 9:6, 7; Mk. 8:22-25; Lk. 17:14, etc.)

On the general subject of anointing with oil done by Christians later (Jas. 5:14-16), there remains the problem of application: whether James' exhortation speaks to all ages of the Church, or only to first-century churches that had miracle-working elders, or whether ANY faithful person should anoint the sick with oil, praying with faith and so expect God's miraculous healing. (On the general problem of miracles, of which anointing the sick with oil is but one illustration, see the Special Study on the Miracles, included at the conclusion of chapter nine.)

What was the effect of this mission? For final notes on this evangelistic tour, see on Mt. 14:1, 13. Bruce (*Training*, 101) astutely observes that "in quality the results of the mission appear to have been much less satisfactory than in their extent." He goes on to point out that shortly after this mission in Galilee, Galileans themselves left Christ almost in a body,

scandalized by His mysterious doctrine. Those who did this were for the most part, just the men who had listened to the

twelve while they preached repentance. Such an issue to a benevolent undertaking must have been deeply disappointing to the heart of Jesus. Yet it is remarkable that the comparative abortiveness of the first evangelistic movement did not prevent Him from repeating the experiment some time after on a still more extensive scale. (Lk. 10:1)

What is the effect of this message and this mission on us? Lewis and Booth (*PHC*, 258, 259) would have us note:

1. The points of resemblance between us and them. In their measure all true disciples are in a similar position with these. They have the same Master above them, the same deposit entrusted to them, the same duty in regard to it, the same choice and the same difficulties before them, the same assurances to support them. . . .

(To this, Barclay [*Matthew*, I, 367] would add: "They were very ordinary men. . . . Jesus is looking, not so much for extraordinary men, as for ordinary men who can do ordinary things extraordinarily well. . . . [As a group] they were the most extraordinary mixture.")

2. The points of difference. When the Apostles thus went forth to their work with their lives in their hands, they went forth to a forlorn hope in the eyes of the world. We in our day and in this respect, are not called to the same. We have the benefit of both their example and experience, and that of the generations like them till now. All the greater, therefore, would be our disgrace if we were to hang back. Every disciple is not expected to lead like these first; but no disciple can expect to be called a disciple if he does not follow when led.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Is there any evidence in this section or any hint in Matthew 10 regarding the length of this ministry performed by the Apostles in Galilee?
2. What is the significance of the mention of the Apostles' "authority over unclean spirits"? (According to Mt. 10:1, 8; Mk. 6:7, 13; Lk. 9:1)
3. What is the special evidence of Jesus' divine nature and authority revealed in this little section?
4. What is the purpose for the anointing with oil in relation to

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healing of the sick? What other NT passages speak of anointing with oil?

5. What was the obvious source of the Apostles' miracle-working power? Who gave them this power?
6. Did Judas Iscariot work miracles? Did Peter? What does your answer to these questions reveal about the nature of miracle workers in general, who do real miracles but whose life is all but perfect? Does the fact that a man works miracles indicate that God approves of his message and his life? How do you distinguish between those miracle workers sent by God and those miracle workers who will one day be rejected by Jesus at the great judgment? (See Mt. 7:21-23)
7. Did the Apostles work any miracles after this mission in Galilee during the ministry of Jesus before He ascended to heaven? If so, when?
8. Does miracle-working power depend upon the special baptism of the Holy Spirit in the life of the miracle worker? That is, are miracles necessarily a special demonstration of the presence and working of God's Holy Spirit?
9. Summarize what the Apostles actually accomplished during this evangelistic tour.
10. What does the fact, that Jesus empowered such men as Judas and Peter, to work miracles and preach the Gospel, tell us about His confidence (1) in the message He would have them preach; (2) in the men themselves? That is, what do we learn about Jesus from the fact that He was willing to entrust such men with such a message?

Section 23

JESUS COMMISSIONS TWELVE APOSTLES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

VII. JESUS ALSO GOES TO EVANGELIZE GALILEE

TEXT: 11:1

1. And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in their cities.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did Jesus Himself go alone, whereas He had sent the Twelve out in pairs?
- b. What do you think Matthew intends to say about the material that immediately precedes this verse, by affirming, "When Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples"? What does this say about the unity of the discourse that precedes this statement?
- c. What is the fundamental difference between the methods of "teaching" and "preaching" in which Jesus engaged?
- d. What psychological effect on the Twelve would the knowledge make, that Jesus, too, is engaged in the same effort as they?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At the conclusion of His instructions, Jesus sent the Twelve Apostles two by two to evangelize Galilee. Then He too set out, on a mission of instruction and gospel proclamation throughout the cities.

NOTES

11:1 **And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples . . .** Thus Matthew draws to a definite close the ordination discourse of the Twelve. Though some feel that Matthew took bits and pieces of other sermons and wove them into the fabric of this message, thus taking great liberties and badly mixing time elements, nevertheless, let it be remembered that Matthew heard the sermon. The modern arm-chair critics did not. (See Introduction to Chapter 10 for fuller notes.) **His twelve disciples**, though now fledgling Apostles with all the power and authority that this grand title implies, they are still and must always be **disciples**, even to be true to their high mission as apostles. Ironically, it was when Judas stopped being a **disciple** that he forfeited all that his apostleship should have meant. What a lesson to us: we never get beyond being **disciples** of the Lord, however great our gifts, however long our service, however vast our knowledge. When we do think we have grown past that point, all of God's gifts in us, intended "for disciples only," will be warped as we try to press them into our own service. It is only in character as **disciples** whose minds are ever open to whatever the Lord reveals, whose will is submitted to His discipleship, that any of us, Apostles or not, are able to be of any use to the Master.

He departed thence to teach and preach in their cities. Having commissioned and empowered His Twelve disciples and divided them into six teams of two workers each, Jesus Himself goes to work on another front, thus making seven evangelistic thrusts in Galilee. Because the Apostles preached His message, shared His ministry, worked His miracles, and copied His manners, in a sense it may be said that they became twelve more Jesus Christs to confront the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" with the tender appeals of the Good Shepherd Himself. Good leadership, as Jesus here demonstrates, does not consist in doing the work of twelve men Himself, but in getting the twelve men to work. Recall his procedure:

1. He shared with all His closer disciples His vision of the task that lay before them. (9:36, 37)
2. He involved them personally in praying about the need for more workers. (9:38)
3. He then chose the most ready among His many travel companions who had known Him, followed Him and already had some experience observing His *modus operandi*. (10:2-4)
4. He empowered them adequately to accomplish all He required of them. (10:1)
5. He explained carefully how they were to proceed and what they might expect. (10:5-15)
6. He gave them a general survey of the long-range direction and purpose of their work, so they might see the specific importance of their immediate tasks. (10:16-39)
7. He gave them hope of succeeding brilliantly despite temporary and seemingly impossible setbacks. (10:40-42)
8. Last, but not at all least, He worked alongside them, not content to be ministered to even in this way. There is no little comfort and encouragement in the knowledge that "Jesus is just over in the next town working at the same task, facing the same hardships, preaching the same message, as we are here!"

It is evident that Jesus did not work in the same villages at the same time as any of the apostolic teams, because both Mark (6:30) and Luke (9:10) signal a definite coming back together as if by appointment. Even without this proof, we could still arrive at the same point, since it would be psychologically crippling to the Apostles' learning process if Jesus had been physically present during any of the presentations of His message, since it would have made

so much more sense to them to let Him do the preaching and, reasonably, receive all the attention. Tactically, too, it would be a mistake, since He would be needlessly duplicating effort in every village where His physical presence overshadowed the evangelistic efforts of the two Apostles trying to labor there. It is more likely to conclude that, once the Twelve had been sent forth, Jesus did not intend to meet any of them again until they convened at a prearranged point sometime near Passover time. Further, He had given the instructions in this discourse what to do if persecuted, so He did not need to rescue them from difficulty. (See notes on 10:23 on "till the Son of man be come.") Also, if there was a prearranged appointment, there was no need to recall them in from their labors for rest.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus do while the Apostles were busy evangelizing Galilee?
2. What was the practical effect of Jesus' sending out the Twelve in teams of two each and then going out Himself to labor in other towns?
3. What emotional effect would be produced on the Apostles themselves by the knowledge that Jesus, too, is working alongside them in other towns?
4. On what basis do we decide here that Jesus did not work in the same towns at the same time as the Apostles themselves visited them?

DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

Matthew 10

Who said the following statements? On what occasion? To whom? Why did they say it? What did they mean? Are there parallel passages? variant manuscript readings? important variant translations? Are there any problems of interpretation? How or to what extent should we apply it to our lives?

1. "Get you no wallet for your journey, neither two coats, nor *shoes*, nor *staff*."
2. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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3. "If the house be worthy let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you."
4. "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
5. "Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come."
6. "For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."
7. ". . . rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
8. "I came not to send peace, but a sword."
9. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his teacher. . . ."
10. "It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city."
11. "He that receiveth you receiveth me. . . ."

SPECIAL STUDY

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Cryptic statements keep cropping up in the Gospels, which speak of a coming of Jesus in His glory during the lifetime of that generation in which the Apostles lived. At first reading, one would think, however, that such notices would be interpreted with primary reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of this age of the world. In fact, some commentators have accused the early Christians, notably Paul, of "mistakenly expecting the imminent return of Christ in his own era, whereas that event has not yet taken place."

On the other hand, there are intriguing coincidences and factors that present quite another picture of Christian eschatology in the first century. Some of the points to be noticed are the following:

1. It is generally presumed that Paul died around 67 or 68 A.D., thus prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the virtual end of the Jewish state. Thus, his references to the coming glorification of Christ during his own lifetime might be affected in part by this fact. This same observation would be generally true of most of the other writing Apostles or Evangelists, except John, if our present state of information (or ignorance) be any indication. In the cases where we have no definite dates for the death of the NT writers, it becomes necessary to depend upon their last message which expresses their views. For this reason we must found our under-

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standing of their doctrine on the best information available to us regarding the date of their writings that have come down to us. While there is by no means unanimity of opinion among scholars about the dating of each NT book, there is reasonably general agreement that all but the Johannine books were written prior to 70 A.D. (See critical introductions to individual books in encyclopedic articles, e.g. *ISBE*, as well as the formal critical introductions to the NT and its books, for delineation of the traditional datings as well as the problems and arguments for dates after 70 A.D.)

2. While the coming of Christ back to earth in the person of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-28) was to be an event with world-shaking consequences, yet the actual narrations of the activity of the Holy Spirit, that was witnessed from the day of pentecost onward until the conclusion of the history included in the NT, do not exhaust all the meaning of those passages which speak of a glorious appearing of the Lord in the lifetime of the Twelve. Nor yet do the strictly Pentecostal manifestations of the coming of the Spirit exhaust the prophecy of Joel (2:28-32) cited by Peter (Ac. 2:16-21; see below on this text.) Those texts which seem to describe a first-century "coming of the Son of man" seem to be picturing an event which is to occur following, but not immediately connected with, the glorious establishment of Christ's Kingdom in its visible manifestation as the Church. Nor yet are these passages especially connected with the final appearance of the Lord at the end of this age. (See below on Mt. 16:28.)
3. A third suggestion is here offered, but not adequately defined, with respect to the Apocalypse of John. It cannot be dealt with adequately here, and must be offered only as a suggestive comment to stimulate further research, since it is not the purpose of this article to deal with all the problems that arise in the interpretation of that book. However, the thorough treatment of this important subject would demand that this exegesis of John's Revelation be made, before any certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the coming of the Son of man. This is true especially if the apocalyptic methodology of Revelation in any way touches that period covering the lifetime of the Apostles. (See below on VI, VII.)

The visions of the Revelation are specifically called "apocalyptic," (from *apokalypsis*, Rev. 1:1). It would there-

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fore be expected that THIS Apocalypse share something of the nature of apocalyptic literature, with the single exception that this Apocalypse, as opposed to all others, is inspired by Jesus' direct revelation of the visions John saw. J.E.H. Thompson (*ISBE*, 161-178) describes the character of apocalypses as a literary method, contrasting this with the method of prophetic books.

Both in matter and form apocalyptic literature and the writings associated with it differ from the prophetic writings of the preceding periods . . . while the predictive element is present in Apocalypses, as in Prophecy, it is more prominent and relates to longer periods and involves a wider grasp of the state of the world at large. Apocalypse could only have been possible under the domination of the great empires. Alike in Prophecy and in Apocalypse there is reference to the coming of the Messiah, but in the latter not only is the Messianic hope more defined, it has a wider reference. In the Prophets and Psalmists the Messiah had mainly to do with Israel. . . . In the Apocalypses the imperial outlook is prominent, beginning with Daniel in which we find the Messianic kingdom represented by a "son of man" over against the bestial empires that had preceded (Dnl. 7:13) and reaching the acme of Apocalypse, if not its conclusion in the Revelation of St. John: "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). While the prophet was primarily a preacher of righteousness and used prediction either as a guarantee, by its fulfilment of his Divine mission, or as an exhibition of the natural result of rebellion against God's righteous laws, to the Apocalypticist prediction was the thing of most importance, and in the more typical Apocalypse there is no moral exhortation whatever. . . . In the literary form employed there are marked differences between Apocalyptic and Prophecy. Both make use of vision, but in Prophecy, in the more restricted sense of the word, these visions are as a rule implied, rather than being described. . . . In the case of the Apocalypses the vision is the vehicle

by which the prediction is conveyed. . . . In (Prophecy) the symbols used are natural, not, as always in Apocalypses, arbitrary . . . (In Apocalypses) there is no natural reason for the changes that take place, only a symbolical one. . . . The apocalyptists always used pure prose, without the elaborate parallelism or cadenced diction of Hebrew poetry. The weird, the gorgeous, or the terrible features of the vision described are thrown into all the higher relief by the baldness of the narrative. . . . (Of the works entitled Apocalyptic) they all claim to be revelations of the future—a future which begins, however, from the days of some ancient saint—and then, passing over the time of its actual composition, ends with the coming of the Messiah, the setting up of the Messianic kingdom and the end of the world. There are others . . . in which the revelation avowedly looks back, and which thus contain an amount of legendary matter.

While the Revelation is both epistolary with regard to its readers and prophecy in its essential spirit and message, it is an apocalypse with respect to its contents. "The Revelation honors apocalyptic methodology but makes it subserve genuine prophecy." (Harrison, *Introductions*, 431)

Thus, while this use of John's Revelation to discuss events prior to its actual composition during the reign of Domitian during John's exile to Patmos (c. 96 A.D.) would perhaps raise objections, since the book is also confessedly a prophecy (cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:6, 7, 18, 19) regarding things that "must soon take place," i.e. after the writing of the book itself (cf. Rev. 1:1, 19; 4:1; 22:6, 7), yet if it be assumed that John's Revelation partook of the literary form of other apocalyptic books, a form which enclosed within its cosmic sweep the writing of history to show some purpose of God seen in the sequence of events, as well as to predict the future, then this objection would have less force. The Revelation could conceivably describe some events prior to, during, and after, the beginning of the Church, the early evangelization, the persecutions, the Jewish War, the destruction of Jerusalem and proceed right on to picture those elements signalling the beginning of the fall of the Roman empire and look out into the distant future to the end of

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time. It remains then, a matter of careful exegesis both of the relative Bible texts involved, as well as a careful reading of history, to determine whether or not this is, in fact, the case.

Besides the foregoing, there are a number of Matthean texts, which seem to picture the coming of the Son of man in judgment upon the Jewish nation during the lifetime of the Apostles.

- I. **"When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes."** (Mt. 10:23)

At first glance, it would seem that Jesus is speaking here of His following up the advance preparation for His coming made by the disciples. In this case, they would merely have gone ahead of Him as an advance advertising committee, in order to assure Him a large interest and popularity in the cities of Israel. Then the point of this exhortation would be haste, since it would be impossible to cover all the Jewish cities before Jesus Himself arrived. But the very context of this solemn admonition demands a graver explanation, more harmonious with the immediate context itself and with the subsequent events. The assumption here is that Jesus' discourse in Matthew 10 is one entire message delivered on the same occasion. (See arguments in the Introduction to chapter 10.)

1. The context, as well as the verse itself, describes fearful persecutions and harrassment by both religious and political rulers, incomprehension within the families of His disciples, universal hatred of Jesus' followers, leadership of the Holy Spirit, betrayals to death and, finally, the necessity to flee, faithful endurance and open confession of allegiance to Jesus in face of certain death.
2. Further, the paragraph in which this admonition is found (Mt. 10:16-23) is itself repeated in the great discourse concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). Interestingly, though Mark and Luke both record without significant variations these words contained in Matthew 10:16-23, Matthew himself, while recording the prophetic discourse in his 24th chapter, does not repeat this paragraph. Instead, he limits himself to a couple of summary sentences that are necessary for the connection of thought. Though some would give another explanation to this phenomenon, we believe that Matthew deliberately omitted to

repeat this particular material (even though he does repeat some other obviously repeated events and sayings of Jesus elsewhere), not only because he had recorded this sermon in chapter 10. He probably omitted the repetition of this material (10:16-23) because he intended to develop the theme of moral preparation required for the great cataclysmic events. This is a hypothesis developed, of course, from what he actually did. (Cf. Mt. 24:37—25:46) By contrast, Mark and Luke, who neither one had recorded this complete discourse in one place (however, see Luke 12:2-12), give their testimony regarding Jesus' great prophetic discourse and omit, or greatly abbreviate, the material Matthew includes on watchful preparation. The point is, of course, that Jesus intended for this material (i.e. Mt. 10:16-23) to be understood primarily in the framework of that period following His ascension into heaven and not in connection with the early efforts at evangelization by the Apostles or the Seventy.

3. Subsequent events in the ministry of the Apostles themselves as they labored under the limited commission (Mt. 10:5-15) until they were reassembled (Mt. 6:30; Lk. 9:10), indicate no such difficulties as are here pictured. This indication is based solely on the information about the Apostles transmitted to us in the four Gospels. If they did in fact encounter persecutions prior to Jesus' crucifixion, we cannot know about it.

But lest Jesus be accused of exaggerating the trials to which the Apostles would be subjected, let it be remembered that Jesus is fully justified in preparing His men in exactly this fashion, since they must face, from the very first of their own ministry, the stubborn reality of opposition to the truth they must preach. Whether this opposition began soon or later should make no difference to them: they must steel themselves for its eventual arrival. The appropriateness of Jesus' warnings during His first commission is seen in the fact that He sends them out fully prepared for whatever may come, even if the worst does not appear until much later when intransigent opposition to Jesus Himself will have hardened and expressed itself in His crucifixion. Psychologically, His men will have already been inured to trouble by His many previous warnings and by their own personal

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experiences in the field when not under His direct supervision.

While the Apostles did not have to face the pictured trials during their early missions, they certainly did have to meet them later. And to deflate any tendency to overconfidence based upon the seemingly overwhelming successes of their first missions, Jesus repeated these warnings in His great prophetic discourse (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21) just two months before He sent them out to evangelize the entire world. At THAT time they would begin to grasp the significance behind those cryptic words uttered earlier (Mt.10:23).

It is obvious, therefore, that the "coming of the Son of man" must have a direct relationship to the ministry of the Apostles AT SUCH TIME AS THEY ACTUALLY FACED THE PERSECUTIONS AND CONSEQUENT NECESSITY TO FLEE pictured in this text. Since they apparently faced the trials and difficulties, that Jesus describes, only after Pentecost and before their own deaths, which, in the case of most of them, occurred before 70 A.D., if tradition may be relied upon to furnish the dates, "the coming of the Son of man" must have some reference to that period. This "coming of the Son of man" must have relationship also to the "cities of Israel," and not to the world in general. The beginning of the end of those "cities of Israel" as a corporate, national entity, can be dated about the same time as the disastrous Jewish War (66-70 A.D.), even though the final, bitter end did not come until the devastations by the Romans after the uprising of Bar-Cochba (132-135 A.D.) Morgan (*Matthew*, 106) poses the intriguing query:

Who shall say that in His Personal Form He did not guide the Roman legions as they took Jerusalem? It is quite certain that there can be no explanation of the coming of the Son of Man in this case except in the sense of judgment. His coming at the fall of Jerusalem, ended the cities of Israel, and this accounted for His urgency and haste in driving His apostles out to tell the story of the King and the Kingdom.

While it is somewhat inexact to say that the "cities of Israel," meaning the existing villages and towns, came to an end with the fall of Jerusalem, yet "the national identity of Judaism was completely and forever lost. The last two institutions of their distinctly national life, the Sanhedrin and the sacrifice, were abolished, never to reappear." (Dana, *NT World*, 105) "Judaism persisted as a religion, but dis-

associated from any political organization or state." (Tenney, *NT Times*, 307)

The above considerations strongly suggest that Jesus intended to intimate to His Apostles that His coming would take place during that period of their ministry in which (1) they faced terrible persecutions; (2) while there were yet in existence the "cities of Israel;" and (3), in some connection with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the state of Israel.

II. **"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom."** (Mt. 16:28)

Needless to say, this verse and its parallels must be considered apart from the verses preceding (i.e. Mt. 16:27; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26), which describe the second coming of Jesus in judgment of the whole world, an event which none of the Apostles lived to see, since this has not yet occurred. Therefore, what Jesus intends by the declaration in question has nothing to do with His return to earth at the end of this age: there are two specific events clearly before His mind.

A quick comparison of the parallel texts of this same saying reveals all Jesus said at that moment:

Mt. 16:28

Mk. 9:1

Lk. 9:27

<p>And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some stand- ing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."</p>	<p>And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some stand- ing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."</p>	<p>But I tell you truly, there are some stand- ing here who will not taste of death before they see the kingdom of God."</p>
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This glorious coming of the Son of man, within the lifetime of the Apostles, which is seen as a manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ and God, is susceptible of application to those events later described as the coming of Christ's Kingdom with power. It is important to remember the larger context of this declaration is the promise that Jesus would establish His Church, an event for which He promised Peter the keys of "the Kingdom." This event obviously began to occur on Pentecost 30 A.D. But this latter fact by no means signifies that the complete fulfilment of Jesus' promise, that the Apostles would live to see His coming in His kingdom, occurred only on that

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day and did not also find fulfilment in events even after that date which continued to establish the obvious rule of Christ.

The coming of the Kingdom of God with power from God certainly took place and visibly on the first Pentecost after Jesus' ascension into heaven. (Lk. 24:49; Ac. 1:3, 8; 2:1-47) But despite the marvellous manifestation of God's power by means of the visible and audible demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's presence, obvious to all then present in Jerusalem, this did not signal the public, definitive and final repudiation of the Jewish nation by God nor the end of the theocracy. The Jewish nation and religion continued on a "business-as-usual" basis at least for another forty years, during which time even the Jewish Christians maintained relatively close relations with the Temple and its rites. (Cf. Ac. 21:20b-26) While the Church actually came into existence and preached its message, yet the full vindication of Christ's claims and the tangible evidence of God's rule (Kingdom) were not so clearly seen until the permanent destruction of Jerusalem as the effective center of Judaism and the total collapse of the Temple and its ministry took place.

But if Jesus' promise (Mt. 16:28) be thought to refer to Pentecost, the spread of Christianity or the internal development of the Gospel in the life of the Church, it is necessary to point out that Jesus does not comfort all of His Apostles by affirming that they would *all* live to see these glorious expressions of God's Kingdom. Rather, "there are some standing here." (*eisin times*: all Synoptics) This limitation, as Plummer (*Luke*, 250) notes, "implies the exceptional privilege of some, as distinct from the common experience of all," and provides a test regarding the time meant, a test that excludes Pentecost, the spread of Christianity, at least, as the first or primary reference of this prophecy. This, because all the Apostles and most of Jesus' disciples lived to see those great events, while that to which Jesus now makes reference was to be the exceptional privilege of only John and perhaps a few others of those present who lived to witness the destruction of Jerusalem, an event which signalled the end of the old dispensation and left the Church of Christ fully vindicated and identified as the only bearer of the divine oracles.

It is revealing in this connection to recall that Jesus promised that the very generation of which He was a part would live to see the fulfilment of His prophecy would be desecrated after a disastrous war. The things which took place at that time Jesus describes as the nearing of "the kingdom of God." (Lk. 21:31, 32; cf. Mt. 24:33, 34; Mk. 13:29, 30) But this latter prophecy cannot in any sense refer

to the beginnings of the Church but has reference to the destruction of Jerusalem.

In order, therefore, to concede as much as possible to those who view Jesus' prophecies that His death would not hinder the establishment of the Church and that, rather, some of those then present would live to see Him come in His Kingdom with power, as having some reference to the establishment of the Church, let us admit that the fulfilment of Jesus' words may have included that. But it is urgent that we recall that the Kingdom of God and Christ is always greater than the Church and includes it. It is never exact to say that the Kingdom equals the Church and vice versa. It is better to define the Kingdom as "the Government of God, the dominion of His laws." The Church is that group of people who willingly submit themselves to God's Kingdom. But there are millions of people who still fall under the rule of God who neither accept that dominion nor are members of the Church. Therefore God's Kingdom includes within its sphere of influence all the wicked, and any time God wants to make His powerful rule felt, by bringing swift punishment upon them, He can and He does. This He did in the lifetime of the Apostles and in that generation of Jews by giving sudden, shocking but deserved punishment to those who had rejected Jesus. While this was not specifically a revelation of His Church (although the Church was revealed as the authentic bearer of the divine oracles of God and finally freed from the vestigial shackles of Judaism), it was a definitive revelation of God's Government, or, the Kingdom of God.

If we have correctly understood Jesus' meaning in this text, then, according to the exact wording of Mt. 16:28, this entire revelation of the Kingdom of God is to be spoken of as "the coming of the Son of man."

III. "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it." (Mt. 21:43)

While this passage does not speak directly of a coming of the Son of man during the generation of His earthly sojourn, its reference to the transfer of the Kingdom of God is most appropriate and interesting. Coming as it does at the conclusion of the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, and specifically stated as its outcome, it clarifies the entire point of the parable and sheds light on some of its terms. The historical moment suggested within the parable itself, when the Kingdom of God would be conspicuously taken from the Jews who had rejected Jesus and the messages of all the prophets,

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and turned over to another group that would produce the results God intended, is precisely when the Lord of the vineyard comes to His vineyard to put those wretches to a miserable death. At that historical juncture, the Kingdom of God will manifestly become the sole responsibility of a separate group of people. At exactly this point in the narrative (Mt. 21:44; Lk. 20:18) the Lord summarizes two prophecies that describe the menace to the wicked represented by the Messiah Himself. (Cf. Psa. 118:22, 23; Isa. 8:14, 15; Dan. 2:34, 35, 44) He Himself is such a menace, for He is the Stone upon which those, who do not see Him for what He is, break themselves; He it is who will fall upon Israel to crush that wicked nation.

Should it be objected that the coming of the Lord of the Vineyard, to be true to the figure of the parable, refers to God, not to the Son who was cast out of the vineyard dead, it must be recalled that (1) the parable could go only so far in describing the reality without inserting the specific information that "the Son then arose from the dead and reentered the vineyard, destroyed those wicked husbandmen, etc. . ." It was Jesus' purpose, obvious from what He actually did say, to evoke a moral judgment from His hearers' sense of right. It was not His purpose to shock their minds with the resurrection, a point actually unnecessary to carry His meaning. (2) The identification of the Lord of the vineyard with His Son is certainly possible, once we understand the unique character of Jesus' relationship to the Father.

IV. "The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

(Mt. 22:7)

The parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Mt. 22:1-14) covers exactly the same ground as the preceding one (Mt. 21:33-46), with but one major advance in thought. The two parables have two common sections:

<i>The Wicked Husbandmen</i>	<i>The Marriage of the King's Son</i>
1. God's dealing with Israel (Mt. 21:33-41a)	1. God's dealings with Israel (Mt. 22:2-7)
2. God's dealings with the Gentiles (21:41b-43)	2. God's dealings with the Gentiles (22:8-10)
	3. God's dealings with individual Christians (22:11-14)

Notice that the turning point between the first and second sections of both parables is the same and significant for our purpose here: after

God had sent many messengers to those who had a covenant with Him, i.e. those who were His subjects, and after these had rejected His longsuffering mercy, He visited judgment upon them, taking away their rights, their privileged position as His subjects. What He had intended for their blessing, He immediately turned over to others who would appreciate His bounty. A closer look at the key verse, which marks the transfer, shows that in this latter parable Jesus bares the method by which God would put those ungrateful wretches to a miserable death: He would use troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. While it may be fairly objected that this detail is but part of the scenery of the parable, necessary to its comprehension but not to be taken literally, it is worthy of note that the literal interpretation of this detail does find an exact fulfilment of Jesus' words when in 70 A.D. the Roman Tenth Legion under Titus battered and burned Jerusalem to the ground.

Further, after the removal of those murderers who spurned God's grace, God throws open the invitation to enjoy His blessings to "just any and everybody," in contrast to those who thought they had most right to them, since they had been invited and should have been prepared. At a particular point in Jewish history this great transfer took place: God's army shattered Jewish nationalism for centuries to come, releasing the Church from any further relationship to Judaism, permitting the world to see the universal character of the Church made up of believing Jews and Gentiles.

In light of these two parables, it is not surprising to hear the Master finish describing the true signs, which precede the destruction of Jerusalem, by mentioning the disastrous war in which "this people will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Lk. 21:23, 24) In literal language He predicts the character of the age to follow that of Jewish opportunity: it shall be a Gentile age. Not only would God use Gentiles to initiate the period by punishing the Jews, but the period would be one of gracious opportunity for the conversion of the Gentiles.

V. **"Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"**
(Mt. 23:38, 39)

These heart-broken words of the rejected Messiah were spoken at a point in Jesus' last week in Jerusalem that is important to note

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and probably surprising to some: they were pronounced AFTER the Triumphal Entry (Mt. 21:1-11). Notwithstanding the certainty that He had already pronounced the same lament regarding Jerusalem the killer of prophets (see Lk. 13:31-35), since it is uttered here at the conclusion of Jesus' exposure of the true character of the corrupt leaders of Judaism whose sins defied Divine Justice, this dark warning becomes the sad farewell of Israel's truest Patriot as well as the solemn sentence pronounced by Israel's true Judge. The obvious import of His words announces the desolation and abandonment of "your house." Whether this "house" is to be understood with reference to the Temple, to the city of Jerusalem (see Plummer, *Matthew*, 325), or to the people of Israel ("the house of Israel"), makes no fundamental difference, since they were to be desolated together. Should it be asked when this national disaster would occur, the context of this lament provides the general time-period: "Upon you (will) come all the righteous blood shed on earth . . . all this will come upon this generation." (Mt. 23:35, 36) That the expression "Generation" is to be taken in its literal, usual sense, and not broadly defined to mean "this race or nation," will be noted later on Mt. 24:34, where the meaning is the same.

The point to notice in this warning is Jesus' cryptic prediction that that generation of wicked, unbelieving Jews would certainly live to see the day when He would appear to them under quite other circumstances than those under which they had brutally rejected Him Who was God's last offer of mercy. But such an appearance does not necessitate a personal visible coming, such as He will make visible to all at the end of the world (cf. Mt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7), but rather a coming in judgment upon Palestine. Should it be objected that "You will not *see* me until . . ." signifies "You will *see* me after . . ." i.e. that this coming to Israel must be visible to the naked eye, we would respond that it was not a visible personal coming to which Jesus referred when He promised His disciples that they too would live to "see the Son of man coming in His Kingdom." (Mt. 16:28)

Further, Jesus would be hidden, from the then living generation, in a certain sense and for a certain period of time which He describes as "not . . . until you say, 'Blessed be He . . .'" Some feel that this pictures a future conversion of the Jews. If so, this suggestion, in effect, becomes equivalent to saying: "You will truly see me for what I am: your Messiah, when you can join your voices to those who recently acclaimed me their Christ during the Triumphal Entry three days ago." That is, when the Jews were individually converted to

Him, they would be able to take up this welcome. However, rather than promising any future wholesale conversion of Israel, according to some millennial theories, this is a threat! "I hereby leave your house desolate. You must preserve as best you can this city and Temple which have been under Divine protection until now. You will never see me again as your Messiah, until you yourselves can take up the joyous welcome to me. My mission to you as your Savior is finished. What I have said and done for you should have been enough to convert you. From now on I personally will not disturb you. If you wish to be taught and saved by me, the initiative must come from you." This interpretation is possible, but there is another emphasis that can also be harmonized with the judgment Jesus pronounced upon the Hebrew nation: "You will not see me again until that moment when I bring devastating punishment upon the house and nation of Israel. In that horrible moment from you will be wrung that cry, that confession, now willingly owned by others, for which you would even this week crucify me! I will come again in judgment and this generation will see it and acknowledge that I was truly the Messiah, but then it will be too late." Jesus has nothing to say about the willingness of those who thus make the cry He predicts. (Cf. similar cases; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:13; 6:12-27; Ro. 14:11)

Since the day of grace was not yet completely over for Jerusalem and since Pentecost was yet future, some Jews actually did repent and see Jesus as Messiah, as witnessed in the book of Acts, but by no means all of them did so. This simple decision separated the obdurate from the obedient.

If we have understood this text correctly, Jesus is predicting a moment when He Himself would return during that generation, a time when Judaism would behold and acknowledge as vindicated Him Whom they had rejected. It would be a moment of Divine Justice, resulting in the permanent desertion and desolation of Israel's famous "house."

VI. "So also when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place." (Mt. 24:33, 34)

Before dealing with this text it must be observed that there is no masculine pronoun ("he") in the Greek text, as represented here by the RSV text; the "he" may well be substituted with "it" or any indefinite subject, since there is no subject expressed in Greek either in this verse or in the text of Mk. 13:29. Something is very near,

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even at the very gates, about to take place or become visible, of which the signs Jesus had just mentioned are indications (Mt. 24:14-22 and perhaps also vv. 23-31). It is Luke (21:29-32) who, in recording the same material, fills in the blank and identifies the "it" left unspecified by Matthew and Mark: "So also when you see these things taking place, you know that THE KINGDOM OF GOD is near." The very things the disciples will have seen taking place are easily identified. They are the many false alarms preceding the universal proclamation of the Gospel for a testimony to the nations, the specific sign of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies and Jerusalem's fall which included the crushing end of classic Judaism. This, says Luke's narrative, is but a herald of the exceeding nearness of the Kingdom of God. The important Lucan text to remember in this connection is Luke 9:27 (see under point II above) which recorded Jesus' exciting promise: "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste of death before they see the KINGDOM OF GOD." Out of this similarity we detect two tempting conclusions:

1. That the expression "this generation" (Mt. 24:34; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 21:32) is to be taken in its natural sense, referring to the people living in Jesus' time. This phrase is not to be applied to the entire race of the Jews living down through the centuries to the present time, however tempting it might be to see their continued existence, despite the terrible judgments just mentioned, as a real wonder, or sign. This definition is sound since Jesus is talking about the same manifestation of the Kingdom of God during the lifetime of the Apostles. So "this generation" means "the people living right now, in these times," i.e. the generation in which Jesus was on earth.
2. That a significant manifestation of God's Kingdom would take place in Jesus' own generation, long after the beginning of the Church and somehow connected with the destruction of Jerusalem is also deduced from this information.

If the identification of this manifestation of the Kingdom of God with "the Son of man coming in His Kingdom with power," be valid (Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27), then that generation of Jewish people would live to see Jesus coming in punitive judgment upon those very people who would have murdered Him. Even if they did not see Him personally coming from heaven in triumphant glory in that era, they would certainly be forced to recognize that their own divine punish-

ment was just, that the Rule of God has passed out of their hands, that the Kingdom of God is now of another people. We who have accepted Jesus recognize that His prophetic words were true and that there is a new people of God, a new holy and royal priesthood, elect out of every nation.

Should it be objected either that "all these things" must include Jesus' prophecies concerning what may be taken to be the events surrounding His own Second Coming (i.e. Mt. 24:23-31; Mk. 13:21-27; Lk. 21:25-28) and therefore Jesus erroneously thought that His own return must occur within that generation, or that "all these things" must include the Second Coming and therefore "this generation" must include all the generations of Jews down to Christ's Second Coming, we respond that all the facts may be otherwise harmonized, rendering both these conclusions incorrect.

J. Marcellus Kik (*Matthew XXIV*) has shown in his excellent exposition of that critical chapter in Christian eschatology that ALL the information in the first section (Mt. 24:4-35) can be interpreted in connection either with the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish nation or with the theological significance of those events. He considers Mt. 24:34 to be the key to the understanding of the times and seasons involved in Jesus' discourse, since he places all that follows that verse within the unknown time limits within which Jesus will return the second time. In the section that most assume has reference to Christ's second coming (Mt. 24:23-31; Mk. 13:21-27; Lk. 21:25-28), Kik believes Jesus is using standardized apocalyptic language for completely earthly events. He feels that this "apocalyptic dialect," created by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel and others, was used by Jesus to convey the fundamentally theological notion that universal dominion, glory and a kingdom has been given to Him as "the Son of man" *par excellence*. (Cf. Dan. 7:13, 14) Kik's contention is that Jesus' "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30), as well as all the other concomitant phenomena in this section (Mt. 24:27-31), may be so interpreted in light of the apocalyptic language of the OT that even this coming of Jesus, seen by the Jews of that generation, found its fulfilment in the judgment of the Jews and the vindication of Christ's rule in the Church.

While Kik's thesis regarding this section (Mt. 24:23-

31) demands further study, it is certainly undeniable that anyone who deals with prophecies given in a Jewish context must also deal with the problem of apocalyptic language which cannot, repeat, must not, be taken literally without doing violence to the meaning intended by the author. This is true whether one is interpreting Matthew 24, the prophecies of Ezekiel or Daniel or the book of Revelation which calls itself "the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ." (See above on apocalypses.) Kik has shown us a consistent interpretation of the sentences (Mt. 24:33, 34) which includes all the information that precedes them (Mt. 24:4-32). Before we can refute his thesis we must see whether it is reasonable to suppose that Jesus would have inserted a full paragraph of "apocalyptic dialect" into a discourse made up of normal prophetic language (to be taken more or less literally). But before passing on, it is worthy of notice that this thesis posits a "coming of the Son of man" at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the nation.

VII. Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mt. 26:64)

Under oath before the whole council of the Jews, Jesus not only confessed to being the Christ, the Son of God. He added, without its being required, that a time would come when those seated there before Him, those who were almost entirely and immediately responsible for His judicial murder, would, in a certain sense, behold Him fully vindicated for the magnificent claims He had just made. These tremendous and magnificent claims are stated before the highest court in the Jewish nation. They are stated, therefore, in the most public way, not only as Jesus' self-incrimination in the eyes of that court, but most especially are these words Jesus' highest revelation of Himself, given in the most formal, public way. But what did He mean?

It is no little temptation to regard these claims literally, i.e. with reference to Jesus' Second Coming, especially since John repeats the latter figure in the Revelation (1:7), a book believed to have been written long after the destruction of Jerusalem. But even John's use of these figures in that place cannot be considered definitive, since he may be citing the OT expressions in regard to Jesus, even as Jesus Himself is apparently doing here. The point of both passages

(i.e. Mt. 26:64 and Rev. 1:7) will have to be sought in the use each makes of those expressions.

In the claim itself we have two separate Messianic references:

1. "Seated at the right hand," as an application of Psa. 110:1 becomes a high claim to messiahship, since this passage was held to be messianic. (Cf. Mt. 22:43-45; Edersheim, *Life*, II, 720, 721) Taken also in connection with the formulation of the oath by which the high priest held Jesus obligated to commit Himself ("Tell us of you are the Christ, the Son of God." Mt. 26:63), this phrase might also call to mind the great Anointed Son of God who as King would rule the nations (Psa. 2; Cf. Jn. 1:49; Edersheim, *Life*, II, 716, 717).
2. "Son of man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven," is a phrase which the high priest would have recognized as a reference to Dan. 7:13, 14. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, 733, 734)

While it may be possible to view these two references as two separate eschatological events or phases of Christ's ultimate divine majesty and coming to judgment in divine glory at the conclusion of the world, yet it would harmonize better with Jesus' immediate situation to interpret His admittedly apocalyptic language in literal language thus: "I admit to being the Christ, the Son of God. Though you consider this blasphemy, nevertheless I can tell you that you will live to see my most daring claims vindicated! You will see my messianic majesty and greatness and dominion as spoken of by the Psalmist and Daniel." Rather than quote the entire passages in each case, Jesus chose key phrases that rapidly summarized the messianic impact of His sovereignty. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1066) is probably right in deciding that

Jesus adds this statement in order to bring his judges to a realization of just whom they are about to condemn to death. He is defining for them who "the Messiah, the Son of God" is: he whom they themselves will see in his divine power, rule and majesty.

No, those Sanhedrists were not to be through with Jesus when they had crucified Him, for just four days later God would designate Him "Son of God in power . . . by His resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:5). Not long thereafter this same Sanhedrin had to deal with the rapidly spreading Gospel of the risen Christ preached by a handful of disciples. The chief point of the Apostles' preaching was "let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God had

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designated both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified!" (Ac. 2:33, 36; 4:10-12; 5:29-32) God's mercy with these Jewish leaders lasted yet 36 years longer (30-66 A.D.), until the Jewish War began. It was then that the storm broke over Palestine that lashed the nation economically, politically and religiously reducing it to a smoking shambles of its former glory. It was then that Jesus came in judgment upon that people, and the Sanhedrists lived to see it.

There are several problems involved in this interpretation of this text:

1. Jesus does not here in the trial scene predict the fall of Jerusalem and His coming in judgment, as He had done earlier on many other public and private occasions. (Cf. Lk. 13:35; 19:41-44; Mt. 23:29-39) It would have been so much more convenient for the theory of His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem and Judaism, had He done so. But He did not clearly speak of this, so, so much the worse for the theory if it fails to explain the language He used.
2. If we believe that Jesus were using "apocalyptic language" derived from the Psalms and Daniel to express His meaning, then, when this same "apocalyptic jargon" is reduced to literal language by expressing the literal meaning of the figures used—by Daniel especially—then there is left no literal "Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven," (itself part of the vision). What is left is Jesus' claim to be vindicated as the reigning, glorious Messiah in the near future in a manner observable by His jurors. One cannot "translate" figurative language into literal, and still hope to make direct use of some part of that figure in his literal interpretation. This is "having one's cake and eating it too!" This observation is not fatal to the theory sustained here, because it is not argued that Jesus appeared over Jerusalem in a manner visible to the Jews, when He punished that city and nation. So the "coming (of the Son of man) on the clouds of heaven" harmonizes perfectly as a concept, with the "coming of the Son of man" described elsewhere.

Answers to these problems may be the following: Jesus meant more than His vindication upon the Jews in the destruction of their Temple and nation, so He did not limit this appearance to the Sanhedrists to merely that single event. He meant His resurrection, the establishment of His Church, the victory of His Gospel, the validation of His claims in the Apostles' ministry and finally, in the generation, the total

collapse of all that those Sanhedrists stood for: the Temple, its ministry, their nation and the place that these Sanhedrists held dear. (Cf. Jn. 11:48) There is no doubting the obvious reference to Dan. 7:13, 14, because of the special rage, scorn and incredulity of the high priest that Jesus would commit Himself so far, incriminate Himself so completely. What is sure is that these Jewish rulers were not to see a personal and visible coming in their generation. Rather, as Kik (*Matthew XXIV*, 84) puts it:

This high priest was to see Christ sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. Can this possibly refer to Christ's second coming when the description "sitting on the right hand of power" precludes such interpretation? It means rather that after the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus would ascend into heaven and take his place on the right hand of God, the Father, as described in Daniel 7:13, 14. . . . When Christ ascended into heaven he was seated upon his Messianic throne. This is in full accord with the declaration of Christ as he was about to ascend into heaven: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." One of the first manifestations of the power and the glory of the Messiah was the destruction of the city that refused to accept him as King and Savior. This act of judgment gave evidence that all power had indeed been given unto him. He did come in the clouds of heaven and rained destruction upon those who had rejected and crucified him. This caused the tribes of the earth to mourn. The sign of the reigning Christ was seen in the destruction of Jerusalem. And the contemporary generation, indicated in verse 34 (i.e., Mt. 24:34), witnessed fulfilment of these things as Christ had prophesied.

Outside of Matthew, let us notice some other texts that suggest the same sort of a coming of Christ in judgment.

VIII. "The coming of the Lord is at hand." (Jas. 5:8)

This verse has particular force, inasmuch as James, if he be identified with James the Just, is remembered by tradition as spending most of his labors in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem. Accordingly, his death in that city prior to its destruction would lend particular force to the admonitions to patient, uncomplaining endurance, since within a few short years, historically speaking, the Lord would actually come in judgment upon Judaism, snatching away from the

unbelievers among the Jews the power to persecute Christians. Objections to this view come from the text itself where the actual wording used by James may be much more technically intended than this interpretation permits. In verses 7 and 8 he adopts the expression *parousia tou kurion*, a phrase almost if not always used with reference to Christ's Second Coming.

IX. "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Heb. 10:25)

While this verse has no direct reference to a coming of the Son of man in the lifetime of the Apostles, it does make use of another technical term usually thought of as having reference to the great day of the Lord's wrath and judgment, especially that to be witnessed at the end of the world. But in the same context the writer cites Habakkuk 2:3, 4 with specific reference to the Messiah (Heb. 10:37, *ho erchomenos hēxei*) On this unusual rendering of the Hebrew text, Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 71) comments:

The LXX have rendered *chi boh jaboh: hōti erchōmenos hēxei*, which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. x. 37) has still further defined by adding the article, and, connecting it with *mikrōn hōson hōson* of Isa. xxvi. 20 (LXX), has taken it as Messianic, and applied to the speedy coming of the Messiah to judgment; not, however, according to the exact meaning of the words, but according to the fundamental idea of the prophetic announcement. For the vision, the certain fulfilment of which is proclaimed by Habakkuk, predicts the judgment upon the power of the world, which the Messiah will bring to completion.

The notes of Milligan (*Hebrews*, 284, 292ff) may be of help here:

To what day does our author here refer? To the day of judgment, say Delitzsch, Alford, Moll and others; when Christ will come in person to raise the dead and reward every man according to his works. But this interpretation is manifestly erroneous. To me at least it seems perfectly obvious that the Apostle refers here to a day which both he and his brethren were looking for as a day that was very near at hand: a day that was about to come on that generation, and try the faith of many. And hence I am constrained to think that Macknight, Scott, Stuart, and others, that the reference is

most likely to the day of Jerusalem's overthrow. Christ himself had foretold the near approach of that event (Matt. 24:34); he had also spoken of the signs of its coming and of the great calamities that would accompany it (Matt. 24:4-41 sic: 29-31?). No doubt, therefore, the Christians in Palestine were all looking forward with much anxiety to the time when this prophecy would be fulfilled. They would naturally speak of it as "the day," the day of trial; the day when seeing Jerusalem encompassed with armies, they would themselves have to flee to the mountains (Luke 21:20-22). . . . But to refer to it exclusively to the day when Christ will come in person to judge the world is clearly inadmissible. See notes on vers. 37. . . .

37. *For yet a little while*, etc. More literally: for yet a little little while (that is, a very little while), He who is coming (*ho erchōmenos*) will come, and will not tarry. The coming One here spoken of is manifestly Christ himself. But what is meant by his coming? To what coming does our author here refer? Many say, "To His second personal coming." But this is plainly inconsistent with the scope of the Apostle's exhortation, as well as with the truth itself. His obvious design in the passage is to encourage the Hebrew brethren in their begun Christian course, on the ground that the coming of Christ was then very near at hand, when they would all be delivered from the snares, reproaches and violence of their persecutors. But how could he consistently and truthfully encourage them to do this, on the ground that the second personal advent of Christ was then very near at hand? It will not do to say with some that the Apostles themselves so believed and so taught. They did neither, but just the reverse. For when some of the Thessalonian brethren so understood Paul's teaching (I Thess. 4:15-17), he promptly addressed to them a second letter, in which he very emphatically corrected their mistake. . . . (2 Thess. 2:1-3). This, then is a clear and satisfactory refutation of the charge that the Apostles believed and taught that the second personal coming of Christ was near at hand in their own day. And so also is the book of Revelation a refutation of it. . . . The coming of Christ, as referred to in our text, must therefore mean, not his second personal coming but, his coming in providence most likely, to destroy Jerusalem, and so to

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deliver his elect from the violent persecutions to which they had long been subjected by the unbelieving Jews (Matt. 24:29-41 sic: 29-31?) To this Christ himself refers encouragingly in Luke 21:28, where, speaking of the signs of Jerusalem's approaching ruin, he says, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." . . .

This view of the matter is also further corroborated by the fact that our author finds in the prophecy of Habakkuk, concerning the overthrow of the Chaldean monarchy, language so appropriate to his purpose that he here takes and applies it to his own; thereby showing that the two cases are very analogous . . . it will be seen that our author does not quote the exact words of God's reply to the Prophet; but as is usual in such cases of accommodation (see Rom. 10:6-8), he so modifies the language as to adapt it to the case in hand. The main lesson is, however, the same in both Hebrews and Habakkuk; viz.: that God would certainly come and execute his purposes at the appointed time: and that while the proud and self-reliant would of necessity perish under the righteous judgments of God, the just man's faith, if it wavered not, would certainly support him under the severest trials.

This was all impressively illustrated in the fall of Jerusalem. The unbelieving Jews were all slain or taken captive; but not a Christian perished in the siege. . . .

X. "The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day." (Ac. 2:20)

Did the events prophetically described by Joel (2:28-32) and cited by Peter (Ac. 2:17-21) find exhaustive fulfilment on the day Pentecost, or were they not rather but the beginning of a series of events that began that day, but did not receive complete expression until the final fall of the judgment of God upon the Jewish nation, the destruction of Jerusalem and the conclusive end of the Jewish economy based upon its priesthood, sacrifices and Temple? One feature of Joel's prophecy, yet cited by Peter, that has no apparent fulfilment at all on Pentecost is the figure of the great astronomical portents: "And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned

to darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." (Joel 2:30; Ac. 2:19, 20)

"The day of the Lord," as shown by Butler (*Minor Prophets*, 84ff), is a technical term used in the OT with four major significations, hence, having as many different kinds of realization in the history of God's dealings with men: (1) judgments upon the covenant people; (2) redemptions of the covenant people; (3) judgments upon the nations; (4) redemptions of the nations. Joel himself in this case describes the particular "day of the Lord" that must occur in his own time, using the same apocalyptic language of judgment. Several times in his description he speaks of astronomical cataclysms (Joel 2:1, 2, 10, 11; 3:15) This gives a specific flavor of "punitive judgment" to these symbols, so that when they are used by Peter, his audience could not but shiver at the awesome threat and divine warning implied in those figures.

If we have understood Mt. 24:4-32 correctly (see above under Mt. 24:34, point VI), it may be that the celestial phenomena, described in the section most often interpreted with reference to the Second Coming (i.e. Mt. 24:29-31), have nothing at all to do with those heavenly bodies. Instead, there, as here, we may see the standard apocalyptic vision of divine judgment. As has been repeated many times before, divine judgment did actually fall on Palestine many years after Pentecost. But is it possible to apply this prophecy just to the fall of the Jewish nation? What has been said earlier about the use of apocalyptic stereotyped language might be true here, inasmuch as we have a clear example of an OT prophet cited whose own contextual information leads us to view his language as highly figurative, hence NOT intending LITERAL celestial phenomena. (Cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2, 10, 11; 3:14, 15 with Isa. 13:1-22 esp. 9, 10; 5:30; 24:21-23; 50:3) While it is true that the Christian writers can speak of the final judgment as "the great and notable day of the Lord," yet the use of this phrase in the OT makes it doubtful whether every appearance of this phrase in the NT must necessarily be applied exclusively and always to the great final judgment at the end of the world. Even the salvation of the believers here predicted (Ac. 2:21) proved to be two-fold salvation, not only of their souls, but also of their lives. They believed Jesus and so were saved from their sins; they believed Jesus' prophecies and so were not destroyed on the great day of the Lord when Jesus judged Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews.

XI. "The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers." (I Pet. 4:7)

These words were addressed by Peter "to the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," (1 Pet. 1:1) probably prior to 70 A.D., since traditional dating of Peter's own martyrdom is placed prior to that date. But would this sentence have much point for the exiles of the Diaspora living in lands distant from Palestine, whose lives and security would not be materially affected by the vicissitudes in Judea? If these are primarily Jewish Christians, as the words of the inscription imply, Peter's admonition would take on particular strength and receive special fulfilment as the nerve center of world-wide Judaism would be torn to the ground, never to rise again for centuries, if ever. The value of this exhortation to these distant Christians would be obvious, since the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, God's chosen house, would probably be looked upon as almost, if not entirely incredible. It would probably be less incredible to these Christians than it was to the disciples who heard Jesus predict these events originally (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21), since the Apostles themselves could have repeated much of the Lord's prophetic discourse to their converts. Hence, just a word of reminder, such as this exhortation of Peter's, would suffice.

But should it be objected that Peter says "The end of ALL things is at hand," it must be remembered that Jesus used similar language to describe the destruction of Jerusalem. (Cf. "all these things" Mt. 24:33, 34 and parallels) Or if it be objected that Peter's words, being indefinitely stated, are also capable of *double entendre*, this is true, but not fatal to the theory suggested here. If it be thought that Peter's words here should be interpreted in light of his later message (2 Pet. 3:8-13), then we respond that here the words are indefinitely aimed at some "end near at hand," whereas Peter in the other passage addressed himself to the scornful demand made by mockers: "Where is the promise of His coming (*parousia*)?" an obvious reference to the Second Coming.

PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THIS THEORY OR ITS PRESENTATION

1. One of the most painfully obvious weaknesses of this study is the fact that it does not take into adequate account the various differing views of each single passage. There are certainly other

passages that should be presented here, just as there are more objections to some used here. As a necessary consequence, the presentation of the evidence is quite one-sided. The justification for this presentation lies therefore in the hope that the reader is already familiar with the other views to which this presentation is but an alternative. This collection of coincidences and single texts must be examined in their contexts in their entirety to appreciate the impact they represent.

2. Another weakness, more serious to the suggestion that the special "coming of the Son of man" refers to Jesus' coming in judgment upon the Jewish nation, is the fact that none of the inspired writers ever declares this interpretation to be the theological meaning of the demise of the Jewish city and nation. This is true, unless the figures of Revelation be so interpreted. (Cf. Rev. 11) Our present state of knowledge regarding the date of NT books gives no mathematical certainty regarding the relationship between the writing of the bulk of the NT books and the date of the Jewish War (66-70 A.D.) While the conservative scholars tend to place the dates of most of them before that tragedy, yet the enigma remains when the Johannine Scriptures are considered. If John wrote considerably after the fall of Jerusalem, why did he not once mention that fact, even though he talked all around the subject of Jerusalem itself in his Gospel and in his Apocalypse could have made reference to it?

There may be other weaknesses too, but let us ask ourselves:

WHAT IS TO BE GAINED IF THIS THEORY BE ACCEPTED AS TRUE?

1. This suggestion provides a possible harmonization for other passages of the NT that contained problems that had seemed insoluble under other schemes, rendering it more difficult to accept the Gospel at face value, for those who did not see this solution. It is not necessary, on the basis of Gospel studies, to conclude that "Jesus was mistaken, since He thought that His own second coming must take place shortly after the fall of the Jewish economy." Nor is it necessary to conclude that "the Apostles themselves and the early Christians erroneously presumed that they would live until the Second Coming." Worse yet, is the opinion that "the discourses in which the eschatological events are predicted are not factual recordings of anything Jesus ever actually said, but are the theological opinions of later ages put into the mouth of Jesus to give them greater credi-

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bility." Instead, if this solution here offered be valid, then the exegesis upon which these unbelieving conclusions were based, may need correction.

2. If this suggestion be true, that Jesus actually came in judgment upon the Jews, then, of course, many texts that were formerly considered as dealing exclusively with the Second Coming will now be subtracted from discussions of that subject. As a result, the texts that actually deal with the Second Coming will be seen much more clearly, since the confusion, created by trying to weigh texts on the destruction of Jerusalem into the conclusions about the Second Coming, would, presumably, no longer exist, since the texts about Jesus' judgment on Judaism would not have to be considered. Needless to say, such clarity made available for eschatological studies surrounding the Second Coming would be of great value. (Rev. 1:3) This clarity would help to place eschatological studies on a surer basis and give them respectability in the eyes of the average Christian who must throw up his hands in despair in face of the present state of confusion in the field.

3. Out of this last expression comes another conclusion. This suggestion that Jesus actually came in judgment upon the Jewish world in the first century would provide us one more reasonably clear evidence that Jesus intends to keep His Word about that future "great day of the Lord" when He will come personally and visibly to judge the nations. His promise would be enough for the average believer. But the certainty of His promise is driven home with redoubled force, when men realize that He has already clearly shown the greatness of His power and the dependability of His promises in the historically verifiable act of judgment upon Judaism in the events beginning with the unsuccessful Jewish Revolt and the disastrous fall of Jerusalem with all its religious consequences for all future ages of both Jerusalem and the Church. Jesus is a Gentleman who keeps His appointments! This, of course, poses an unveiled threat to every complacent person who frankly enjoys his sinful way of life. The eschatological hope of the Christians is not unfounded, wishful thinking, but rather a splendidly concrete reality already in motion, of which the smashing judgment of unbelieving Judaism and the glorious vindication of the Church's claims was but an earnest and evidence.

4. The historical importance of the destruction of Jerusalem and the blotting out of the Jewish theocracy is inestimable to Christianity in the following ways, listed by Newman (*Manual of Church History*,

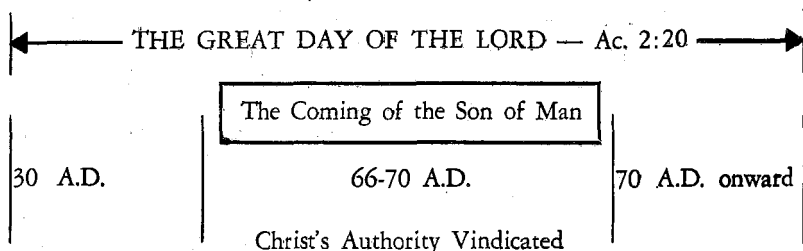
I, 118, 119; see also Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, I, 402, 403):

- a. It marked in the most unmistakable way the end of the old dispensation and the complete emancipation of Christianity from the thralldom of Judaism. It was henceforth impossible for any one to observe the ceremonial law in its fullness. No doubt the Pauline type of Christianity would ultimately have become dominant apart from this fearful interposition of Divine Providence. Judaistic Christianity was to persist in the form of sects, but catholic Christianity could no longer be Judaizing.
- b. The destruction of the city was very commonly looked upon by Christians as a divine judgment on the Jewish people for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. It may safely be said that if the Jews as a body, or a large portion of them, had accepted Christ as their Saviour and had become partakers of the Spirit of Christ, the Jewish Zealots, who brought ruin upon their people, would not have arisen or would not have secured popular support.
- c. The great catastrophe may be regarded as a direct fulfilment of our Lord's predictions as recorded in Matt. 21:43 and 23:37-39 and in Luke 21:20-28.
- d. This great event is regarded by many as a fulfilment of our Lord's prophecies regarding his speedy coming in his kingdom (Matt. 10:23; 16:28; 24:34), and of such passages in the apostolic Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles as represent the Lord's advent as imminent. It seems harsh to associate so glorious an event as the Lord's coming with a catastrophe so terrible; yet there can be no question but that the destruction of the city and the theocracy gave a freedom and a universality to the gospel which mark an epoch in the history of Christianity and placed the gradually advancing kingdom of Christ on a firm basis.
- e. There is no reason to think that the Roman authorities at this time discriminated carefully between Christianity and Judaism in favor of the former; but the time had past when the accusations of Jews against Christians would be heeded by the civil courts. Henceforth the Jews were without political influence and were treated with contempt by the Roman officials.

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In view of the foregoing, consider the following

SKETCH OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS REPRESENTED



Descent of the Holy Spirit	Preaching of the Gospel to all nations for a testimony to them	Final rupture between the Church and Judaism	Church of Christ alone vindicated as the only authorized bearer of the divine oracles
Pentecost	Persecutions False Christs National disorders Wars, natural upheavals	Destruction of Temple Fall of Jerusalem End of Classic Judaism Dispersion of Jews	Unsuccessful Uprisings and final dispersion of Jews (general: 115-117; Bar-Kochbah, 132-135)

Jewish Theocracy finally repudiated by God

SOME FURTHER COMMENTS ON ARGUMENTS FOR JESUS' DEITY AND AUTHORITY

I. HIS PRECISION AS A PROPHET

G. C. Morgan (*Matthew*, 104): "One of the most profound reasons for trusting Christ today in the matter of all Christian service

is that here and elsewhere He revealed His perfect knowledge of conditions which no man could forecast, and which yet have transpired exactly as He foretold them." What is more significant, as Morgan declares, is that the keenest of human foresight could not foresee the distinct changes of direction that history, in direct relationship to His disciples, would have taken. "Let us notice that the change of conditions created by the crucifixion of Jesus, and again by the fall of Jerusalem, are self-evident. The position of these men was greatly changed after the crucifixion of Jesus; and it was greatly changed again when the principal force in persecuting them was broken. It is perfectly clear that the King foresaw these things, and that He understood perfectly the whole movement of the years that stretched before Him."

II. HIS CANDOR, HONESTY AND COMPASSION

Barclay (*Matthew I*, 385): "Here is my task for you—at its grimmest and at its worst—do you accept it?"

McGarvey, (*Matthew-Mark*, 95): "There is a contrast between Jesus and the originators of earthly enterprises, whether secular or religious. It is the custom of the latter to paint in glowing colors the brighter prospects of the causes they plead, and to conceal from both themselves and others the darker side of the picture. But Jesus presents faithfully before His disciples all of the hardships and sufferings which await them, not omitting death itself—and death, it may be, on the cross. The foreknowledge displayed is proof of His divinity, while the compassion and the candor which accompany it are such as we would expect in the Son of God."

Notice that His revelations of the brutal realities in the fearful future are not given in a brutal manner. The Lord compassionately shows the help available in time of need.

Though it is not the usual way to win followers, nevertheless Jesus appeals to that adventurer hidden in the heart of every man. In the long run, one does not attract MEN to the easy way by inducements of comfort, advancement, ease, and fulfillment of worldly ambitions. It is the honest challenge of the heroic that ultimately appeals to men. The Church softens this approach and waters her message to her peril!

III. HIS ROYAL DEMANDS

Plummer (*Matthew*, 157): "For My sake.' Again we have a claim which is monstrous if He who makes it is not conscious of

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being Divine. Who is it that is going to own us or renounce us before God's judgment-seat (32, 33)? Who is it that promises with such confidence that the man who loses his life for His sake shall find it? And these momentous utterances are spoken as if the Speaker had no shadow of doubt as to their truth, and as if He expected that His hearers would at once accept them. What is more, thousands of Christians, generation after generation, have shaped their lives by them and have proved their truth by repeated experience."

IV. HIS ASSUMED AUTHORITY

Bengel, (cited in *PHC*, 242): "Great is the authority of conferring authority." Notice how simply Jesus is reported to have done it. (Mt. 10:1) There is no great apologetic which lists reasons why Jesus should have the right to confer authority upon His disciples. Matthew says, "He simply did it, and that was that!"

Note His claim, everywhere implicit in the chapter, that our faith in Jesus determines our standing before God.

Other points suggested by Lewis and Booth, *PHC*, XXII, 245:

V. THE CONSISTENCY OF THE SAVIOR—The prayers He enjoins, the provisions He makes, the instructions He gives, are all of a piece.

VI. THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SAVIOR.—He does not set His workmen to begin at the top of the ladder. He does not ask them at first what, to many among them, will not be too easy at last. Not first apart from Him, but first by His side.

VII. THE FORETHOUGHT OF THE SAVIOR.—He sets them at first to that which will help to qualify them for what has to be done at the last.

CHAPTER ELEVEN OUTLINES

Section 24

JESUS RECEIVES QUESTIONS FROM JOHN AND PREACHES SERMON ON JOHN (11:2-19)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Section 25

JESUS CONDEMNS UNBELIEVING
CITIES AND INVITES "BABES" TO
COME TO HIM (11:20-30)

STUDY OUTLINES

- I. Challenging the Christ to Change (11:2, 3)
- II. Christ Convinces and Cautions His Captive Comrade (11:4-6)
- III. Christ's Charitable Commendation of the Conscientious Champion (11:7-11)
 - A. A Changeling's Character? (11:7)
 - B. A Courtier's Costume? (11:8)
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- VII. Heaven's King (11:25-27) Unconquerable Submission
 - A. Joyous Thanksgiving (11:25, 26)
 - B. Majestic Self-revelation (11:27)
- VIII. Heart-felt Compassion (11:28-30) Pleading, Universal Invitation

Section 24

JESUS RECEIVES A QUESTION FROM
JOHN AND PREACHES A
SERMON ON JOHN

(Parallel: Luke 7:18-35)

TEXT: 11:2-19

2. Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples
3. and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

4. and Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see:
5. the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them.
6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.
7. And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes, concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken with the wind?
8. But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft *raiment*? Behold, they that wear soft *raiment* are in king's houses.
9. But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.
10. This is he, of whom it is written,
Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way before thee.
11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.
13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.
14. And if ye are willing to receive *it*, this is Elijah, that is to come.
15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
16. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call unto their fellows
17. and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn.
18. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon.
19. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! And wisdom is justified by her works.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If John is shut up in prison, how is it that he is so free in prison to send messengers to Jesus?
- b. If you had been preaching fiery judgment upon Israel, warning the people that the Messiah would come with a threshing shovel in His hand to separate the wicked from the righteous and threat-

ening the wicked by saying that the ax is ready at the foot of the trees to hew down the wicked that produced no fruit,—if this had been YOUR message, and yet the Messiah came along watering the trees, what would have been your reaction? You had preached judgment, but He proclaims mercy and the grace of God. What kind of questions would YOU have had?

- c. Some commentators feel that John was not asking this great question for himself but rather for his disciples. Do you think this is correct? If so, on what basis do you agree? If no, why not?
- d. Why, would you say, do questions hurt men worse than torture?
- e. Do you think it is God's will to torture men with agonizing questions? If not, then why does not God answer their questions? If so, then how do you harmonize His goodness with this permission that lets such questions continue to harass the minds of His creatures, yes, even the minds of such great men as John the Baptist?
- f. How do you account for the true greatness of John the Baptist?
- g. Do you feel that people would be more godly today if they imitated John's general manner of life, his austere food and clothing? If not, what should they imitate? If so, how would this imitation better the moral quality of society?
- h. When a man is shut up in prison for a period of time, one begins to see the real fiber of which his character is made. That confinement of his body and that limitation of the free expression of his spirit is more than many a man can bear. What expressions of faith and high moral character does John yet reveal now while in the imprisonment?
- i. What do you hold to be the secret of John's greatness?
- j. What do you hold to be the reason why John was actually greater than other prophets?
- k. In what respect is "the least in the kingdom of heaven greater than he"? Explain how John, the greatest man ever born, could be less than the least in God's kingdom.
- l. How can John the Baptist be "the Elijah who is to come," whereas John himself denied being Elijah? (See Jn. 1:21)
- m. Why do you think Jesus keeps saying in so many of His sermons: "He who has ears to hear with, let him hear"? Were the people of His time short on ears? Or were they just not using the equipment they had? Explain what Jesus meant by that pithy admonition.
- n. Do you think that this question John asked was painful to Jesus, since He was surrounded by multitudes who surely must have heard

John's messengers pose the question? Was it not a latent lack of confidence in the evidence that Jesus had already given of His identity and consequent authority?

- o. Explain how God's kingdom had suffered violence and how violent men were taking it by force, even since the beginning of John's preaching.
- p. What evidence should have already convinced John once and for all that Jesus was everything that John had predicted Him to be? What evidence did Jesus send back to John to persuade him this time?
- q. Jesus describes the personal habits of John the Baptist as those of an ascetic or a recluse, "eating no bread and drinking no wine." He describes His own habits as those of one who mixed well with people "eating and drinking." Now, discounting as exaggerations the slanders that the Jews levelled at John and Jesus both ("He has a demon." "Behold, a glutton and wine-drinker"), yet is there any basis of fact in the inference drawn from Jesus' own statement, that Jesus certainly drank wine? On what basis do you answer as you do?
- r. How is the intended slander levelled against Jesus, "a friend of taxcollectors and sinners," in a higher sense, His glory and finest proof that He is really God come in the flesh?
- s. Standing this side of the cross, John Hallett can teach us to sing, "There's no disappointment in Jesus, He's all that He promised to be . . ." Ideally, of course, this is true. Yet, John the Baptist stood in grave danger of being "disappointed in Jesus." What one ingredient, common to our human predicament, would put you personally in the prison of perplexity and cause you too to be shocked and even infuriated that Jesus is not what you thought Him to be?
- t. Now, having answered the preceding question, what is there in Jesus' answer to John that attenuates your perplexity too, comforts your disappointment or, at least, makes it not nearly so important as it had seemed? In what frame of reference is it possible to sing: "His love and His care comfort me everywhere; He is no disappointment to me"?
- u. Is it completely true that we must never become a stumbling-block for our neighbors? Jesus knew fully well that His message, ministry and manners were a terrible scandal to His own people, and yet He did not alter His program or character nor tailor His gospel on that account. To what extent then are we to adjust to

our environment so as not to give an occasion of sin to our fellows without compromising our Gospel and to what extent must we never change regardless of how many fall? (Study Mt. 18:5-10; 1 Co. 8; 10:23-33 in contrast with 1 Co. 1:18-25 esp. v. 23; 1 Pet. 2:4-8)

- v. Puzzle of puzzles, why did not Jesus liberate John by a blazing word of miraculous power? Why did He permit him to die what looks like a senseless death, with a silly dancing-girl and her scheming, wicked mother managing the whole thing?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

It was while John the Baptist was in prison that he heard about all the things Jesus was doing. His disciples came to him and reported the deeds Jesus Christ was accomplishing. Selecting two of his followers, he sent the Lord a message by these men, asking, "Are you really the Messiah, or are we to keep on waiting for and expecting someone else to be the one?"

So when these two men arrived where Jesus was, they repeated John's question: "John the Baptist has sent us to ask you, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we going to have to look for someone else who will do the job?'"

Right then and there Jesus cured many sick people who had all kinds of diseases and evil spirits. To many that were blind He gave their sight.

Then Jesus made this reply to John's question, "You go tell John exactly what you have just seen and heard today: how the blind recovered their sight, the lame are walking again. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf can now hear. I have raised the dead to life again. Even people who could never afford to pay for it are getting to hear the Good News! John, you will be a happy man indeed, if you can trust me implicitly. Do not be shocked or hurt over what you do not understand of my ministry that does not seem to match your concept of what it should be."

It was later, when the messengers of John had left to report to him this answer, that Jesus began to address the crowds concerning John the Baptist:

"What spectacle drew you out into the wilderness? A reed easily bent by the wind? A weak, trembling man disturbed by the slightest rumor of danger? No? Then why did you go out there? To see someone clad in silks and satins? Of course not! The dapper dressers

with their soft, elegant garments and their life of luxury are to be found in royal court circles, not in kings' prisons! Tell me now, why did you really go out there anyway? To see a prophet? Let me tell you this: you saw someone far more than an ordinary prophet! This is the very man about whom Malachi penned the ancient lines (3:1):

'Behold my herald whom I am sending on ahead of you:

He shall prepare your way for you.'

I tell you this: there has never yet been born on earth the mother's son that can excel John the Baptist! And yet, paradoxically, the humblest member of God's Kingdom is a greater man than John!

"Ever since the appearance of John the Baptist until today God's Kingdom has been subjected to violence. Violent men, like the Zealots, try to seize control of it. Until John came, only the Law of Moses and the prophets represented God's Word to men. However, if your mind is open to receive this information, I would say that John is the great 'Elijah' that Malachi (4:5) promised would come. Pay close attention to the meaning of what I am saying!

"When the common people heard John, they all, even the most notoriously wicked among them—even the tax collectors—agreed that God's plan was just. They showed this by being immersed in harmony with the rite preached by John. All the people, did this, that is, except the Pharisees and the lawyers. These latter rejected God's eternal purpose for them, as far as they personally were concerned, because they refused to be immersed by John the Baptist."

Jesus went on: "But what description adequately reflects the mentality of the people of today? They are like a group of children sitting in the marketplace, protesting to their playmates, 'We wanted to play wedding, so we piped to you and you refused to dance. Then we tried playing funeral. So we wailed, but you did not cooperate: you did not mourn nor weep! What DO you want to play?' I tell you this, because John lived an ascetic life, neither eating common food nor drinking wine like a normal person would. But you slander him, saying, 'Something must be wrong with a man like that! He has a demon—he's mad!' Then I came along, living the normal life, eating and drinking like anyone else, and what do you say? 'Look at that glutton! He's a drinker and a party-goer! He certainly knows how to pick his friends too: outsiders, tramps, no one with whom any respectable person should have anything to do!' Nevertheless, despite your unreasonableness, real wisdom is proved true and right by what it produces! The ultimate verdict about the wisdom of our different

approaches lies not with you contrary critics, but with the results John and I produce."

SUMMARY

When John the Baptist learned of the merciful ministry of Jesus, he determined to learn the real meaning of the difference between his own fiery predictions and what Jesus was planning. His two messengers relayed his question to Jesus. Rather than answer them directly, Jesus continued to give evidence of His true identity by doing God's work in the presence of John's envoys. Then, in messianic language drawn from Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus summarized His ministry and evidence to give John reasons to continue to trust Him. John's messengers then reported this message back to John.

After they departed, Jesus eulogized John's greatness as God's prophet, calling him the greatest man who ever lived, the great herald of the Messiah, the promised prophet whose coming immediately preceded the great day of the Lord. Further, those simple people who accepted John's message vindicated God by accepting the word of His prophet in obedience, whereas the religious leaders of the nation frustrated God's plans for them. Worse, the majority of Jesus' contemporaries rejected John because he was too serious, not human enough, but rejected Jesus because He was too human, not holy enough. But the course chosen by each will be vindicated by the ultimate results each achieves.

NOTES

I. CHALLENGING THE CHRIST TO CHANGE (11:2, 3)

11:2 **Now when John heard in the prison**, taken as introductory to this section, does not affirm that this event has even the slightest connection with the foregoing material in Matthew's chapter 10. The time reference is most general: **Now when John heard** (*ho de Ioánnēs akoúsas*). The aorist participle indicates no time relationship at all, except that related to the main verb of the sentence, *eipen* (said), another aorist that views the action as a mere past event without stating any connection or continuity with what preceded it. It is Luke who informs us both of the more precise chronological connections, how it was that John was informed and what specific deeds of Christ were most likely the subject of John's musings: "The disciples of John told him of all these things." (Lk. 7:18) Very likely, the disciples' report included the curing of the

Centurion's slave and the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain and many other signs. (Lk. 7:1-17) Details of John's imprisonment are available from many sources (Mt. 4:12; 14:3-5; Mk. 6:17-20; Lk. 3:19, 20; cf. also Josephus' *Antiquities*, XVIII, 5, 2). Had we only Matthew's Gospel, we would be puzzled by the very access John's disciples had to their master who was very clearly bound in prison under lock and key (cf. *édesēn* and *katékleisen* of Mt. 14:3; Lk. 3:20) by Herod who ultimately murdered him there. The enigma is solved by Mark, who, although he does not record the incident of John's question, yet furnishes the explanation by inserting a fact in quite another context that explains John's liberty to send the message to Jesus: "Herodias had a grudge against him and would willingly have executed him but she could not do it, for Herod had a deep respect for John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, so he protected him. When he listened to him he was greatly disturbed, yet he enjoyed hearing him." (Mk. 6:19, 20) From these sources we may conclude that in Herod's border-castle, Machaerus, near the northeast end of the Dead Sea, was the site where John spent his last days. The puppet-king Herod Antipas merely shut the wilderness preacher in the fort, but did not ill-treat him. The imprisonment, while politically necessary from Herod's view, must have been half-hearted, because the king's troubled conscience clearly accused him. Antipas knew where the path of truth and righteousness lay. Though he must often have conversed with the Baptist, he did not repent. (See notes on Mt. 14:1-12) In this frame of mind, he conceded John the visits of his disciples. Later, these followers were permitted to bury their leader after his execution. (Mt. 14:12)

An even greater perplexity is to be found in the expression "John's disciples." After the revelation of the Messiah's identity at His baptism, why did not John just drop everything to become Jesus' personal disciple? Was it further necessary to make disciples on his own? Why did these men remain attached to John after their master had unequivocally indicated the Nazarene to be the "Lamb of God," "the Son of God," "the Bridegroom"? Further, how could John be satisfied when his understudies remain under his tutelage? Or is the answer to be found in the intermeshing of the events in their time-sequence? That is, was there too little time to conclude his own work and join Jesus before Herod got him? If so, John would be in prison almost a year now when he sends this query to Jesus. (Cf. the connections between the events recorded in Jesus' early ministry immediately preceding John's arrest: Mt. 3, 4; Mk. 1;

Lk. 3; Jn. 2-4.) If the 40 days of Jesus' temptation be added to the period He spent in Galilee (Jn. 2:1, 12) before the first Passover of His public ministry (Jn. 2:13ff), and if His ministry in Sychar of Samaria were concluded "four months before harvest" (Jn. 4:35, supposing this to be a calendar reference used as the basis for spiritual teaching), and supposing His trip north through Samaria to have been occasioned by pressure from the Pharisees (Jn. 4:1-3) as much as by the imprisonment of John (Mt. 4:12), we conclude that there were as much as four summer months between John's first identification of Jesus as the Messiah before his fatal imprisonment. But before we condemn John for not swinging the entire bloc of his movement behind Jesus, let us recall the state of communications of that period. While he may have been able to immerse many pilgrims from many lands on their way to the great national feasts, he would not see most of them until the next feast, nor they him. Apparently some of them never heard about Jesus even years after Pentecost. (Cf. Ac. 18:24, 25; 19:1-4) Now if John could publish no communiques for nationwide distribution prior to his incarceration, how much less could he influence his own followers after Herod held him practically incommunicado, isolated from the center of national life and influence!

John heard in prison the works of the Christ. Matthew writes what it was that John heard described to him, but did John hear it just this way, i.e. the works are those of Jesus the Messiah? Or is Matthew's personal faith just coming through this narrative, seen in the choice of words he uses? If John heard that Jesus was Christ known by His works, he is the more in error for forming the question he does. For, from whatever motive, who could propound such a query, once he is firmly convinced that Jesus is indeed the Messiah with all the divine authority that this involves? He who fully understands that the Messiah is to be God Himself come in human form, could hardly bring himself to presume to challenge Him about any portion of His program. But did John grasp this? As Jesus will show later (11:11), John's life was lived out in an era before the full-orbed revelation was given.

Before proceeding to the problem why John should have asked such a dangerous question, we must ask who is this **John . . . in prison?** Who was he as a prophet and as a man?

1. His own divine inspiration and calling by God cannot be doubted. (Lk. 3:2; Jn. 1:6; 5:33)
2. At Jesus' baptism, John heard the voice of God indicating

Him as "the Son of God," and saw the coming of the Spirit upon Him. (Mt. 3:13-17; Jn. 1:29-34)

3. His description of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" indicates a profound revelation of the mission of Jesus. (Jn. 1:29, 36) Did he understand what it meant to be God's "Lamb"?
4. Further, the prophecies of the OT received significant confirmation in the revelation God made to John at the baptism of the Lord. (Cf. Ps. 2:7 with Mt. 3:17; Isa. 61:1; 11:1-5 with Mt. 3:16)
5. There is great moral comprehension of his own relative unimportance expressed in the magnanimous declaration: "He must increase and I must decrease!" (Jn. 3:26-30; cf. Mt. 3:11)
6. Immediately prior to this question sent to Jesus, he had heard men speak of the works of the Christ, i.e. as well as His general mode of operation. (Mt. 11:2; Lk. 7:18)

But John was human too. Before "the word of God came to John" (Lk. 3:2) he had been just plain John. Before "there was a man sent from God," (Jn. 1:6) he had been a man, and that man, now trapped in Herod's prison where his life will be tragically snuffed out, must learn a fundamental lesson facing all true prophets. Simply stated, the lesson is that once an unquestionably inspired prophet or apostle has delivered his God-breathed message, that man of God must then submit himself with faithful allegiance and unswerving personal obedience to that message, even though he may not have had revealed to him all the other explanations of God's will that may bear directly on what the prophet already knows. God does not have to explain everything to a man, not even to a prophet. But God will always give grounds for faith that that man may trust Him, leaving the unexplained in God's hands to reveal them as He chooses. Or, to state his quandary differently, what did John NOT know? His divine commission and past inspiration did not also guarantee him omniscience as well. John had preached a message of judgment, of threshing fans, of axes laid at the foot of trees and of unquenchable fire (Mt. 3:10-12), but Jesus keeps watering the trees, trying to save them! (Cf. Lk. 13:6-9) John could not see how Jesus' merciful ministry could fulfill his own divine predictions about that ministry. Abuses were everywhere; sin was going unchallenged. Judgment was needed! John could not see how the Christ was seeking, in the goodness of God, to sow the seeds of faith upon which the great, ultimate judgment of humanity would be based. Was **John in prison** meditating on Malachi 3:1-4:6? Was he reflecting on the messages he had

thundered to the nation, shaking it out of its lethargy and indifference? Certainly the passion for righteousness still blazed like a prophetic fire in his breast.

QUESTIONS HURT MEN WORSE THAN TORTURE

- a. Remember Job's cries, "Why? Why?" (see Job 3:11-23; 7:19-21)
- b. Consider Habakkuk's complaint: "Why are you not doing something about this wicked people, Israel?" (Hab. 1:1-4) God answers: "I am doing something! I am rousing the Chaldeans for Israel's punishment." (Hab. 1:5-11) "But God, how can you use vile idolators to punish a nation more relatively righteous than they?" (Hab. 1:12-17) God's famous reply is paraphrased: "By definition, a 'righteous man' is one who lives by his confidence that I know what I am doing. Habakkuk, you can trust me, even though you see what appear to you to be deep, far-reaching contradictions in the arrangement of my plans!" (Hab. 2:2-4) There is sweet submission in Habakkuk's prayer as he admits the justice of God's punishment upon Israel. Though it meant personal and immediate trial for him and other righteous men in Israel (Hab. 3:16, 17), yet he can rest in God who IS Himself the answer to Habakkuk's complaint (Hab. 3:18, 19).
- c. Out of Paul's experience in praying three times that his "thorn in the flesh" might be removed, he learned true strength. (2 Co. 12:8-10) With many good and sufficient justifications Paul could have importuned God by arguing how much more effective a work he could be doing without this weakness: "Why, Father, must I, your Apostle to the Gentiles, be so hampered?" But after revealing Christ's message to others, Paul must also submit himself to the daily discipline as any other believer.
- d. Peter, after preaching the universality of God's grace "unto as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him" (Ac. 2:39), still did not grasp the fact that this must also mean Gentiles too. (Ac. 10, 11; Gal. 2)

Examples could be multiplied of divinely inspired men whose torturing, unanswered questions, which could reasonably be expected of thinking men, remained to disturb their minds. These all, John the Baptist included, could and must rest in

the confidence that God knew what He was doing, even though His reasons were not immediately evident.

John's peculiar problem probably lay in his own concepts and expectations regarding the Messiah, which, in turn, were likely not wholly uninfluenced by the popular concepts of the times, even though greatly molded by his own inspired preaching. To him had not been revealed, for example, the time-distances between the appearance of the Messiah immediately after John's own ministry and the farther baptism by the Christ in the Holy Spirit and the still more distant judgment by fire. (Cf. Mt. 3:9-12) The burden of the prophetic message of John had depicted a Messiah that would have brought to Israel an immediate, inescapable punishment upon the wicked. But it seemed to John that Jesus was doing nothing but help the wicked, even going to the unthinkable lengths of eating and drinking with them, while trying to redeem them! Because of Jesus' actions, it seemed to John that He was not fulfilling the messianic concept that John himself had predicted. So he needed an explanation both of the mission and purposes of the Lord, since neither was clear to him. (Remember 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Mt. 13:16, 17)

11:3 and said unto him, **Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?** John's choice of words implies "Do we await **one of another** kind?" (*hétéron*) Although Luke (7:20) has *allon* ("another of the same kind"), despite the fact that good MSS have *hétéron*, even *allon* must imply "another somewhat different" and not an exact twin. Otherwise, a Messiah exactly like Jesus would not accomplish all that John dreamed. **He that cometh** (*ho erchómenos*), in John's mouth here, means "the Christ." Was this a fixed phrase, or, a technical term, used by the Greek-speaking Jews, at least, to mean "the Messiah?" (Cf. Ps. 118:26; Hab. 2:3; Mal. 3:1; Dan. 7:13 with Mt. 21:9 and parallels; 23:39; Lu. 13:35; Jn. 1:15[?]; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; Heb. 10:37; Rev. 1:4, or are these merely coincidences in Greek that prove nothing?) Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 668) thinks it not too likely, since Jewish thought ran more to the coming age ushered in by the Christ. But that John's question rings with messianic emphasis is demonstrated by the fact that Jesus' answer, for those who have ears to hear it, definitely affirmed Him to be the Christ. (See below on 11:4-6)

Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? The meaning of this surprising question is bound up in the motivation behind it, so inextricably interwoven with it that one is incomprehensible without the other. While the obvious import of John's

question is whether Jesus be "the Christ" in an absolute sense, on what rational basis could the Baptist even consider possible the existence of a second "Coming One," somehow different from Jesus? Were two Messiahs conceivable in Jewish thought? Indeed, such a double-Messiah concept was entirely possible to any Jew who had not yet seen the full-blown revelation of the union in one person of all the many-sided characteristics to be found in the Son of God, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, the Prophet, the High Priest of Melchizedek's Order, etc. John has too much evidence to disregard, or refuse, Jesus as the Christ in at least some wonderful sense. But since He did not seem to aspire to the positions usually assigned to the Messiah by popular Jewish expectations, or even by John's own reflections on the subject, perhaps John arrived at the alternate theory of not one unique Messiah, but two. Accordingly, Jesus would then be partially Messiah in one significant sense, because He brought to fruition some of the ancient prophecies, but (so John may have reasoned) another Coming One would be required to fulfil the balance of the prophecies. Jesus is unique, and only a long-range view of His total ministry would have unveiled what John could not see.

But before criticizing John for having too low a view of Jesus, let us appreciate this striking paradox: the Lord of the Universe who is coming for us, will be so different from the Jesus of Nazareth remembered by any who knew Him in the flesh that we may almost describe Him as "Another (of a different kind)!" When we contrast His past humiliation, His lowly service, His apparent defeats with majesty and glorious judgment as King who will finally bring to pass the second phase of John's wonderful predictions, we too begin to perceive that we also believe that the earthly history of Jesus of Nazareth is not the whole story, for we, like John, have seen only His first coming. As in the case of John, so also in ours, the time element between the first and second comings of Jesus has not been revealed. But John perished before discovering what we know, who live after Jesus' first coming: that Jesus did not intend to fulfil all of John's predictions on His first coming. Ironically, we too are scanning the heavens for that very "other Christ" about whom John queried the Lord, that other Messiah who will one day swing the axe into fruitless trees, purge His threshing floor, gather His grain and blash the chaff with inextinguishable fire! (Cf. Phil. 2:20, 21; Col. 3:4; 1 Th. 1:10; 3:13; 4:13-18; 2 Th. 1:7-10; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 7:24-28; 9:27, 28; 1 Jn. 3:2, 3)

If that be the meaning of John's question, what could be the motivation behind it? The Baptist's following included widely-scattered men of deep commitments like Jesus' early disciples, Apollos of Alexandria and others. (Cf. Jn. 1:35ff.; Ac. 18:24—19:7) So the great influence wielded by John over Israel in earlier months could not now be ignored as his question is dropped like a live hand grenade in this public assembly around Jesus. (see Lk. 7:21) If it be true that John and Jesus were preaching by the same Spirit, as they had led others to believe, why is it that one poses this seemingly embarrassing problem to the Other? Is this now a break in the monolithic system that these two had hitherto represented? Two authentic spokesmen for the same God cannot contradict each other or call into doubt the other's message or identity. John's perplexed "Are you the Christ—or not?" rumbled with ominous significance. Embarrassed disciples of Jesus must have fumed at this surprise attack from an unexpected quarter, even as embarrassed commentators today seek an explanation for this incongruous perplexity tearing at the heart of John. Why did John ask it?

1. Did he wish perhaps to confirm to his disciples what he himself had claimed for Jesus?
 - a. One writer (*PHC*, XXII, 265) exclaims: "But even so, it is surprising that his disciples should have such doubts to clear up. To think that he should have to send them to the Saviour Himself to settle their minds about Him. What had been the aim of his preaching amongst those disciples? What the subject . . . power . . . the effect? Apparently the very message he came to teach has been so taught by him as not yet to be learned!" This could be important, since his disciples had not left him to follow Jesus as they should have done long before. (See on Mt. 9:14-17) On the other hand, in fairness to them, it must be said that the fact that he continued to have disciples may only imply that he continued his work so long as he was free to make devoted followers whom he could mold for Jesus. But had they truly understood John, they would not have crystallized his movement into a permanent sect during his imprisonment. Perhaps they tended to do that earlier, but now that he is thrown into prison for his courageous preaching, his rating in their estimation zoomed to heroic proportions. Their zeal for his cause and their personal affection made it all the more

imperative that they NOT leave him at this crisis. Their dogged unwillingness to leave him now, though appreciated for its human worth, marked the furthest limit of their progress and sealed his failure. His imprisonment leaves them without a shepherd capable of guiding them into further truth or checking their excessive zeal toward sectarianism. There was none but Jesus Himself who could help them now. According to this view, then, John, finding himself totally frustrated, unable to continue his converting people to follow Jesus, sends two of his most reliable men directly to the Lord in the hope that He be able to convince them to follow Him.

b. Objections to this view have been suggested:

- (1) There is no necessary evidence that the disciples, on leaving Jesus to carry the message back to John, even understood their message. This is not to say that Jesus' cryptic words were incomprehensible to the average person, since we who live in the full light of His total revelation may draw colossal encouragements from them. But those who lived in a period not yet enlightened by this exposition of truth may not have grasped His meaning at all very quickly. The reply itself is better understood upon reflection and by those steeped in OT Scripture who could evaluate the evidences herein offered.
- (2) Christ's reply was addressed not to the disciples but
 - (a) "Go and tell John" (Mt. 11:4)
 - (b) The blessing is stated in the singular "Blessed is he" (*makários estin hós. . .*), as if deliberately levelled at John. Admittedly, this singular can be a universal blessing, as the commentary below will show.
 - (c) Neither Jesus nor John are pretending either to ask or answer this question. That is, this is John's own question, not one put by him in the mouths of his followers that would express their doubts. (See Lk. 7:20) Nor does Jesus pretend to go along with the game by feigning to answer John while really answering the Baptist's representatives then in His presence.

(d) The psychological need for Jesus' discourse about John (11:7-19) demands explanation if only a few of his disciples were seeming to waver in their convictions about Jesus. Jesus' defense of John is only plausible on the basis that John himself needed the defense.

2. Was John beginning to doubt?

- a. The psychological justification for this view is strong, since a man facing death cannot afford to be tortured by questions. He must be certain. He is not afraid to die but does not intend to die for the wrong thing. Greater anguish than death is torturing his mind now. Had John become so discouraged, so humiliated by his imprisonment that he needed further proof of Jesus' identity that would serve to verify even his own ministry to himself? Ederheim (*Life*, I, 661) seems to hear those stabbing doubts.

Was this the Kingdom he had come to announce as near at hand; for which he had longed, prayed, toiled, suffered, utterly denied himself and all that made life pleasant. . . . Where was the Christ? Was He the Christ? What was He doing? Was He eating and drinking all this while with publicans and sinners, when he, the Baptist, was suffering for Him? . . . had he succeeded in anything? . . . What if, after all, there had been some terrible mistake on his part? At any rate the logic of events was against him. He was now the fast prisoner of that Herod, to whom he had spoken with authority; in the power of that bold adulteress, Herodias. . . . It must have been a terrible hour. . . . At the end of one's life . . . to have such a question meeting him as: Art Thou He; or do we wait for another? Am I right, or in error and leading others into error? must have been truly awful.

- b. While this view is psychologically possible in light of "questions that try men's souls," nevertheless John's stern wilderness preparation, his being inured to hardship by his lonely vigils in the wilds of Judah, compounded with the positive identification of Jesus as the Messiah by God, combine together to render the case too certain to be

surrendered by doubt now. Nor is John likely to be disloyal or lose courage because he suddenly lost the freedom to stride up and down the Jordan valley preaching, since just such persecutions had awaited the great prophets before him. He was not unaware of the price for being a prophet in a wicked and turbulent age. It would be a greater psychological quirk in John to imagine that he had forgotten the events of no more than one year previous, which had signalled to him the identity of Jesus, or that these events were so utterly insignificant to him as to permit him to entertain such doubts as would mark a shattering of his faith in the Nazarene. Note:

- (1) He shows great faith by sending to JESUS for information, willing to accept whatever answer He gave.
 - (2) He perhaps doubted his own conclusions and asks Jesus in real humility how his own message about Jesus could harmonize with Jesus' actual fulfilment of that message.
 - (3) He surely knew that a false Christ would never admit to being an imposter.
 - (4) John may be a bit impatient with Jesus' slow, gentle ministry, wishing He would make more obvious progress but John's very approach proves John's extreme confidence in Jesus: Jesus would answer this question well and must answer in such a way as to bring action.
 - (5) John's last public word eloquently declares his faith from his prison cell: "Go ask JESUS! He knows the answers that can save us!"
3. Or perhaps the Lord's herald longed for clarification of something in the mission of Jesus that was not at all clear to him.
- a. Inspiration on some subjects, after all, does not mean omniscience on all. The possession of great visions or the ability to work miracles does not override the power to reason. This question, accordingly, is not a failure of confidence or of John's personal faith, since John sends his disciples directly to Jesus and to no one else. The main thrust of his evangelism had been a call to repentance in view of the coming judgment at the hands of the Messiah. Jesus, although indubitably marked as God's Anointed One, was using methods clearly (to John)

contrasting with, if not contradicting, his predictions. Further, while certain features of the Lord's first and second comings were revealed to and through John, yet the Baptist's recorded messages give no hint that the Messiah was actually to appear two times on earth, at times separated as widely as several milleniums. (Cf. Mt. 3:1-12; Mk. 1:2-8; Lk. 3:1-18; Jn. 1:19-34; 3:25-36) If these facts were disclosed only by later revelations, it is not surprising that this caged lion did not know them, hence needed clarifications on many points. (Cf. Ac. 1:6)

- b. Objection to this view is seen in the exceeding (if not, exaggerated) forcefulness of John's phrasing. The imperious, almost judicial tone of John demands that his inquiry be interpreted as something more than a simple, gentle request for information. How could a humble, trusting disciple, like John is here supposed to be, even dare to admit his own inner turmoil by comparing Jesus with "another (that cometh)"? No, there is too much bite, too much ill-disguised impatience with Jesus, in that phrasing. Interestingly enough, Jesus' reply provides John with no new information that would clarify Jesus' program which had so puzzled the prisoner. Rather he calls John back to reconsider the old evidence furnished by the miracles, the ancient prophecies and the responsibility to trust God despite one's own incomplete understanding.

4. Was John impatient?

- a. This is a young man's reaction: John was burning to see some action! (He was only six months older than the Lord Himself. Cf. Lk. 1:36, 56; 2:1-7) Absolutely convinced that his Cousin was God's Messiah, John could not fathom why Jesus was not making more progress, why He was not claiming a more indisputably prominent position, why He had not yet destroyed such iniquitous chaff as Herod Antipas and Herodias. How futilely inconsistent it seemed to John for Jesus to do "the works of the Christ" and not establish a Messianic throne in Zion! Even though John himself had predicted the great messianic works of grace ("Holy Spirit," Mt. 3:11; "gather wheat into garner" Mt. 3:12; show all men "the salvation of God" Lk. 3:6), yet Jesus' actual service seemed all grace and no judgment, so John was impatient. Just a single

word from Jesus could destroy the wicked rulers, unite the righteous, free John and usher in the kingdom of God! His question, then, may be paraphrased with the rude expression: "Are you really the Christ, or are we going to have to find someone else to do the job?" With this kind of prodding, John determined to pressure Jesus into changing the fundamental nature of His program from a slow, gentle ministry of patient mercy to one of fiery judgment. This reveals John's tactical reason for making this question and, consequently, its answer, as public as possible. Had the disciples asked Jesus the same question privately, it would not have had the same psychological pressure to force Him to answer it decisively, as it did publicly. John could foresee that both friends and critics would hear it, would be intensely interested in His reply and move in closer to see and hear how Jesus reacted. The result would be increased pressure on Jesus to declare Himself openly and, presumably, get on with the business of bringing in the messianic kingdom.

- b. Objections to this view are not easy, since this explanation combines the fierce love of John for Jesus, his total confidence in His ability, his imperious familiarity (he felt that he could talk to Jesus that way and get away with it), his zeal for God's Kingdom and righteousness. One objection to this as the exclusive meaning of John's question, is the fact that Jesus' answer is adaptable to all four possibilities in one way or another. (See below under "the evidential value of this section.")

While it is not easy to reject absolutely any of these suggestions, because a plausible case can be made for each, yet the psychological probabilities lie more clearly with the last one.

EVIDENTIAL VALUE OF THIS SECTION

The significance of the presence of this very incident in the Bible lies in two directions:

1. The internal value: Could this narrative be the unmasking of a cunning devised fable? It would be presumed that the great messianic herald could not have become so thoroughly disappointed in Jesus as to pose Him this impatient question! Which part is true then: the narrative of John's earlier testimony to Jesus' Messiahship, or this one which tells of his misgivings? But this very record, which bares the weakness

of this strong man, could have no sense except in light of his previous witness to Jesus. This ignorance, this impatience is precisely what we should expect from one who said all that John had previously preached. Edersheim, (*Life*, I, 668) notes:

When he sent his disciples with this question straight to Christ, he had already conquered; for such a question addressed to a possibly false Messiah has no meaning.

So this astounding question harmonizes perfectly with what is known of John earlier, and the testimony of Scripture which contains both accounts stands so much stronger for including both in the narrative.

2. This question posed by John is our question too! Is Jesus the final revelation of God, or not? Is there someone else besides Jesus with whom we shall have to do? Whether we need help in convincing others, or whether we are plagued with doubts of our own, whether we think that we need clarification when we should rather trust Him despite our limited knowledge, or whether we are impatient for God to do something about evil in the world, whatever our perplexity, Jesus' answer fits our need perfectly! John's perplexity furnished the occasion for Jesus to answer the heart-cry of all thinking men: "Are you God's last word, the ultimate reality, or must we turn to Another for the satisfaction of our soul's deepest need?"
3. One other detail that portrays the stark realism in this section was noticed by Foster (*SLC*, 1955, 404):

We do not envy those two disciples the task which had been assigned to them. As they stood in the great throng and watched the amazing miracles of Jesus and heard His thrilling sermon, they must have found it very difficult to persuade themselves to move to the front and actually ask Jesus such questions that challenged His whole campaign. But their devotion to John and the recollection of his command in prison and the certainty of his imminent death, if Christ did not come to his rescue, made them bold to speak. . . . These were the questions uppermost in the minds of all the people. They must have been stirred to the depths of their hearts as they heard John's disciples ask these questions.

They must have pressed a little closer to hear the discussion, for these were the very things they themselves wanted to know.

II. CHRIST CONVINCES AND CAUTIONS HIS CAPTIVE COMRADE (11:4-6)

However anguishing this question must have been to Jesus, coming as it does from a man who, given his extraordinary privileges to know more than others, should have responded better, yet with inimitable gentleness, understanding and sympathy, the Lord formed His reply to John. He grasped perfectly the torture of the Gethsemane out of which His famous cousin cried. He knew every hour of anguish John was then enduring down in the dank cell of Machaerus. Though this impatient question challenges Jesus' whole course of action, though curious, critical crowds by their very presence add to the pressure on Him, the Lord is Master of Himself! With consummate patience and wisdom He worded His strongly suggestive yet modest answer. As to the substance He provided a decisive conclusion to John's query, while not directly committing Himself on this crucial issue. This fact, however, suggests another mystery: Why did not Jesus just say, "Yes, John, I am the Christ" and be done with it?

1. Because to respond directly to THIS question in the presence of THESE multitudes (Mt. 11:7), would have meant that Jesus must openly declare Himself to be the Messiah (was John counting upon that eventuality?), even though the popular crowd would not have understood the true, spiritual meaning that the Lord would have wanted to communicate by that term. The crowd would have accepted Him as Jewish Messiah and crowned Him to be such a king as they desired. But this very act would have turned Him into their slave, reducing His grand mission to a rule over a tiny, insignificant kingdom and would have made Him dependent upon their extremely restricted conception of the true Messiahship as God had intended it. Jesus could not have answered John's question directly and openly before that mob, because to have done so would have instantly compromised His entire spiritual mission.
2. He did not answer John with a simple affirmation unsupported by ulterior evidences, because to have done this would still have left doubts in the mind of John. Any imposter could have claimed, "Yes, I am the Christ."

3. Jesus answered the way He did, because John's true need was not for an answer that would have made him believe in Jesus on the basis of a mathematical certainty. John needed to trust Jesus on the basis of the firmly established evidences already available to him. John did not at this point need intellectual debate or overwhelming argument that forced him to have a helpless confidence in Jesus' program. He must now stand fast, confident of the proofs already given, and so experience the real meaning of faith.

Luke, at this point, includes a striking detail that serves as background for Jesus' proof: "In that hour He cured many of diseases, plagues and evil spirits. On many that were blind he bestowed sight." (Lk. 7:21) Did Jesus do this on purpose with the specific end in view to make John's disciples eyewitnesses? Did He make John's disciples wait for His reply while, unperturbed, He continued His healing? If so, Jesus' self-mastery is thrown into even greater relief, since He deliberately lets John's question float lazily over that excited crowd while, all unruffled, Jesus calmly goes about His work as if nothing at all had occurred, but fully knowing that the tension in the crowd is growing to fever pitch: they too must hear the full answer to that question. Instead of shouting to get their attention, as was sometimes necessary (see Mt. 15:10; Mk. 8:34), He lets John's explosive demand agitate the crowds into moving in closer and quieting down to hear. When they were fully ready He made His move:

11:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see:

11:5 The blind receive their sight,

and the lame walk,

the lepers are cleansed,

and the deaf hear,

and the dead are raised up,

and the poor have good tidings preached to them.

THIS is a fit answer for the fuming campaigner down in Herod's prison? Here he had expected a drastic change in the Messiah's program which would violently overthrow God's enemies and get the Messiah's Kingdom underway, and this is the best excuse the Messiah Himself can give for His amazing lack of progress in that direction! His response is almost anticlimatic for people who were aching for a positive statement. But let their tempers cool, let them examine the indisputable evidence to feel the force of this brilliant argumenta-

tion! Jesus' proof of His identity is all the stronger because He is deliberately understating His evidence! Notice further that He sends no list of philosophical arguments why John (or anyone else) should believe Him to be the unique Messiah fully in control of His proper mission. Rather, He orders the two messengers to report to John what is happening, what He himself is doing. Jesus unconditionally applies to Himself, and invites John to subject Him to, the acid test of deeds and results, a test He will later (see on v. 19b) put into the hands of His critics. The Lord wished to be measured not only by the power of His talk. He constantly pointed to His "works," His deeds which identify Him to be God's final representative. (Cf. Jn. 14:10, 11; 10:37, 38) In other words, Jesus repeats for John the Baptist the very same evidences given to everyone. The Lord is not partial, giving to some special help not also available to any other. This fact is crucial, since the answer of Jesus will contain the all-sufficient proof that should identify Him to any man anywhere. What is this answer?

1. EVIDENCE of His identity and consequent right to expect unwavering allegiance: the miracles.
 - a. Done in the presence of hundreds of eyewitnesses, including John's disciples, they could not be gainsaid. (Lk. 7:21) They were not a matter of hear-say evidence.
 - b. Jesus claimed to work miracles. (Mt. 11:4, 5; Lk. 7:21, 22) The fact that He states only what occurs to the afflicted, leaving it to John's disciples to add that Jesus is actually working these prodigious miracles, does not detract from this emphatic declaration. Let those eclectics who think they believe Jesus' words but, ironically, reject His miracles, consider this affirmation! (See the special study on Miracles.) The impressive list of miracles cited argues how extensive and how commonly known was the proof Jesus had provided the nation as a foundation for settling just such a question as now stood before Him!
 - c. The impact of this evidence lies in the fact that the miracles could only have been done by the power and with the approval of God. They became, thus, the authenticating stamp of approval upon the precise course followed by Jesus. This fact alone rebukes both doubt and impatience.
 - d. For the doubters of our age it is well to remember with Plummer (*Luke*, 203) that

It is clear, not only that Luke and Matthew understand Jesus to refer to bodily and not spiritual healings, but that they are right in doing so. John's messengers had not "seen and heard" Christ healing the spiritually blind and the morally leprous. Moreover, what need to add *ptōchoi euaggelizontai*, if all that precedes refers to the preaching of the good tidings? It is unnatural to express the same fact, first by a series of metaphors, and then literally. All the clauses should be taken literally.

e. While it is true that the works of healing would prove no more than Jesus was a great prophet, nevertheless they were not unexplained wonders unconnected from a well-known schema of revelation that runs through the OT right up to Christ. Nor were they unconnected from what Jesus was saying about Himself. As proof, they do not make Jesus' claims or His teaching true, but they are the attestation of God that His claims are well-founded and His teaching God's. Since, then, Jesus claimed to be more than merely a great Prophet, His miracles attest God's approval of Jesus' affirmations about Himself. His wonders and signs are God's way of testifying that Jesus' highest claims are true. (Cf. Jn. 4:25, 26, 42; 8:12, 24, 31, 32 etc.)

2. EVIDENCE by implication from the nature of the miracles themselves. Because Jesus' miracles are directly linked to God's preparation for His coming, worked out in the OT prophets, it is not surprising to hear Him describe His ministry by using snatches of prophetic passages. (Cf. Isa. 29:18, 19; 35:5-7; 61:1-3 with Lk. 4:18-21) Jesus' choice of words are no mere recitation of facts, made more singular by the fact that He omits explicit mention of His own great part in this. His recital concludes with the most sublimely cryptic words, that would have almost no meaning for someone not in tune with OT prophecies: "The poor have good tidings preached to them." But to the man well-read in Isaiah, this simple phrase speaks volumes: "Reexamine what the prophets had predicted the Christ would do!" By implication Jesus is saying that the OT prophets had predicted just such a ministry as that in which He was then engaged. So doing, the Lord drives John right back to his Bible to reconsider the prophets'

message in order to see the perfect harmony between His program and their predictions concerning the Messiah.

3. EVIDENCE from the unworldly nature of His ministry: **The poor have good tidings preached to them.** John had already heard of the miracles (11:2) and much of His procedure (Lk. 7:18), so much of Jesus' present answer was not new to him. But it was superbly Messianic and unfortunately new that the impoverished, the afflicted, the meek, the humble, the "inferior," in short, the common people should be the special object of divine care. This concern for the weak, those who do not count, who cannot pay, whose voice is too weak to cry aloud for help, this genuine concern that brings a Royal Gospel to these without money or price, is remarkable proof of its divine origin. (Cf. Isa. 11:4; 29:19; 32:7; 55:1ff.; Rev. 21:6; 22:17) To borrow Plummer's vivid expression (*Luke*, 203), "The poor, whom the Greek despised and the Roman trampled on, and who the priests and the Levite left on one side," commonly neglected or exploited as worthless and ignorant, are now, by God's special choice and the Messiah's efforts, brought into the Kingdom of God. (Cf. Jas. 2:5, 6; Lk. 6:20) This simple phrase ("the poor receive the Gospel") measures the distance that separated Jesus' messiahship from the common Jewish concept, and demonstrates how completely Jesus was proceeding in perfect harmony with God's plans.

Several commentators note that Jesus' rehearsal of His Messianic accomplishments rises dramatically from common miracles of healing to (what would seem to us to be) the crowning miracle, resurrection of the dead. What could be higher or of more value than this? But Jesus continues in climactic fashion, finishing by estimating the proclamation of the gospel to the poor as above all miracles generally, superior even to the power to resurrect the dead! If this be correct, from an apologetic standpoint, it is most interesting. Among peoples whose sacred literature abounds in unexplained wonders and to whom miracles in legends is the rule rather than the exception, as well as among skeptical peoples who have lived to see the exposure of counterfeits and frauds, there is especially needed one other crowning proof of the divine origin of the message of Christ. Here the Master furnishes that critical proof. The sheer genius behind His

choice of this evidence is the fact that, while miracles and signs can be counterfeited by any pretended prophet, it is not likely that human selfishness in the prophet himself would permit him to counterfeit a tender, long-suffering sympathy for helpless sufferers who can in no way remunerate Him. Compassion of this kind does not belong to this world. It marks itself instantly as divine.

Here again, Jesus submits Himself to the test of time. He is willing not only to point to His miraculous works which already tell us so much about Him. More than this, He underlines the value of the long-range estimate of His life and ministry. It is as though Jesus had said, "My miracles identify my Messiahship as truly divine; my concern for the poor marks my ministry as humane in its highest sense."

The Lord Jesus fully understood the absolute essentiality of all three proofs of the divine authenticity of His message and mission, and His Church ignores any one of them to her peril! Church history is spotted with overemphasis or crass ignorance of one or more of these evidences: miracles, prophecy or genuine humanity to man in its highest sense. Later (15:1-20) Jesus will thunder to the Pharisees a lesson we can learn here: "No religion, regardless of its pretended origin and miraculous proofs, can call itself divine if it makes a man mean, inhuman, or indifferent to the weak!"

In this answer returned to John, significant for its absence is any reference to judgment and vengeance. (Cf. Isa. 35:4) This omission is meaningful, since John must have been straining to hear just these very words. His silence on this subject says to John, "Be patient: I am proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor now. One day I will announce the day of the vengeance of our God. But not yet." Even though He breathes not a word to John about the fiery vengeance of the Messiah upon the wicked, He not only refuses to side-step the issue, but solemnly declares Himself openly to the multitudes. (See on 11:20-24)

11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me. There is something strangely ominous about this tender beatitude. While it possesses all the gentle persuasion of a blessing, its gentleness lies in its form not its content! Expressed as a benediction, its antithesis is clear: "Woe be to the man who is so disappointed by me that he ceases to trust me and so is lost!" So certain is Jesus that He would become a "stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall," and misunderstood by the

majority of the people, that He issues this warning sheathed in a blessing. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:8; Isa. 8:14, 15; Mt. 8:34; 13:57; 26:31; Jn. 6:60, 61; 1 Co. 1:22-25) What kind of Messiah is Jesus going to be, if not to be shocked by Him is seen as something especially blessed? But the very reason for framing His warning in the form of a blessing at this point, points to the very need of John and everyone else who would be scandalized by Jesus. Even the most satisfyingly persuasive miracle will fail to convince anyone unless his mind is open, willing to be won over, unless his prejudices are laid aside in favor of a new love. This appealing gentleness of Jesus is deliberately calculated to open the mind and close the sale. This approach is the more psychologically sound and effective because of the long-standing preconceived notions men have about what God's Messiah has to say and be. Rather than shout and pound His fist, ramming His point home (as was sometimes the case and necessarily so), the Lord intentionally uses "soft-sell," understating His evidence, weakening His cause in the eyes of all neo-Maccabeans, quietly closing with a patient refusal to change anything.

How could John the Baptist, of all people, possibly have been scandalized by Him? That this is no remote possibility is amply proven by considering what evidence John had already been given, evidence that should have sufficed to allay any doubts and calm all impatience. John is seriously tempted to ignore the clear voice of God speaking directly to him from heaven and the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Master. What greater evidence could another Christ give, if these were the credentials that certified Jesus? What in John would cause such profound dissatisfaction with Jesus that lowered Jesus in his esteem to be something less than the Coming One? These perplexities may be resolved by posing another question: Why should any person be disappointed in Jesus?

1. The Lord failed the Zealots by not forming a liberation army against the Romans.
2. Jesus did not interest the rich, self-sufficient Sadducees because of His humble birth, lack of proper rabbinical accreditation and because of (ultimately) unpopular religious, social and political views.
3. He turned off all the popular enthusiasts, since His entire program failed to support commonly held preconceptions.
4. He shocked the leaders of established religion, the Pharisees, by opposing the rabbis, whose position was held in maximum reverence by the Hebrews themselves.

5. He lost the ear of the grand majority by not blessing what they wanted, did not do what they pleased, nor catered to their whims.

Another (PHC, XXII, 273), adhering more closely to John's personal problem, analyzes the reasons for being offended by Jesus:

1. The peculiarities of early education often give rise to this temptation of offence in Christ. . . . We too have the prejudices of our own special education and standpoint.

2. This temptation is sometimes connected with the fact that Christ seems to abandon His friends to the most cruel suffering and oppression. The unbelief that starts in suffering, rather than in a syllogism of the scribe has a special claim to sympathy and patient love. . . . Do we not sometimes fall into the temptation of thinking that Christ under-estimates our temporal well-being?

3. The limitations that hem in our love of the excitements and activities of public service often give rise to this peril. . . . Possibly we feel within us a capacity for effective religious enterprise, from the exercise of which we are cut off by some embarrassing condition in our lives.

4. This peril sometimes springs up because our knowledge of Christ comes through indirect and prejudiced channels. . . . This offence may arise in us because we have to view Christ, in some of His relations, through crude, ignoble, small-minded representatives.

A man will always be discouraged with Jesus if he thinks that he himself knows best. Unless we hold lightly and tentatively our views about what the Kingdom of God has to be, unless there is a definitely humble willingness to learn from Jesus, an intelligent flexibility and intellectual honesty about our own great ignorance, when Jesus Christ cuts across OUR ideas, we are in for a shock! So John, too, could have been scandalized by holding tenaciously to his own concept of the Messiah. But like any prejudice, his concept represented only a partial vision of the truth. Had John known all the truth about Jesus, he probably would not have dashed off this question. Nevertheless, it was this PARTIAL vision, this INADEQUATE understanding which would cause John to disbelieve, if he clung blindly to it. Not only John, but any man, definitely stands in danger of stumbling into the same fatal error of rejecting the claims of Jesus because they do not suit his own views.

To him and to all, Jesus would say, "Though I may not seem to be moving rapidly enough in the right directions to suit the views, tastes and ambitions of many people, I know where I am going. I know best how to plan my Kingdom. I do not intend to change my pace or my course, even though this will mean that many, who are unwilling to trust me to know what I am about, will be left shaken, will walk away in disgust and never come back. Happy is the man who can stand the shock when my methods, my manners, my message and my mission collide with his opinions about them. Blessed indeed is the man who can trust me perfectly, who can see me for what I really am, *accept me for what I am really doing, even though he does not understand why,—who can do all that and not doubt!*"

This simple beatitude is a call to trust Jesus to know what He is doing, for only this unhesitating childlike confidence will keep us from falling (see on 11:25). Only a disciple can keep from falling; the wise and understanding, who know too much to accept things as Jesus presents them, will always stumble.

The Bible writers do not provide us the sequel to this incident, leaving us thus with unanswered questions: how did John react to the mysterious message repeated to him by his couriers? Did he plummet into further despair at what must have seemed (humanly speaking) to be the failure of his attempt to get answers and action out of Jesus? In light of the Judge's praise (see on 11:7-19), it is more probable that he plunged into profounder reflection upon the whole burden of the prophetic message, and, like the very prophets themselves whom he read, bowed his head in perplexity, struggling with the meaning of it all. (1 Pet. 1:10, 11) In a world of limited knowledge, vast ignorance and imperfect justice, ruled by a patient God who will have all men come to repentance, John had to learn what it means to cry: "Not my will but thine be done!" It required a *sinewy, tough-minded trust* to hold John steady as he lay in his dungeon, captive, doomed and alone, yes, but blessed, and not offended by Jesus.

Offended. Jesus' personal example speaks volumes on the subject of causing one's neighbor to stumble. He was the greatest stumbling-block the Jews were ever to know. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-8; 1 Co. 1:23) His mode of life, His message of mercy, the speed and direction with which He conducted His ministry, His view of the Messiahship were all good things that definitely caused many of His own people so utterly to fall that they never rose again to believe Him or follow Him further. Nevertheless, the Lord did not change one iota of

His program or life-style in order to keep that from happening. No one was more sensitive to the weaknesses of the little ones than He, yet He did not swerve from the path of righteousness, even though He knew this to be a collision course with popular error. He also knew that He could not win over everyone, but this realization did not at all lessen the heartbreak nor keep Him from trying. (Cf. Mt. 7:13, 14 with 23:37) But this beatitude (11:6) by its very existence represents a hard look at the probabilities and marks as particularly blessed those remarkable individuals who trust Him enough to swallow their disappointment and remain His disciples.

III. CHRIST'S CHARITABLE COMMENDATION OF THE CONSCIENTIOUS CHAMPION (11:7-11)

11:7 **And as these went their way, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes . . .** Observe how Jesus permits John's messengers to get well out of earshot before taking up the line of thought that follows. He may have done this deliberately for two reasons:

1. The multitude themselves needed to reflect deeply on (what must have seemed to them) the mysterious message sent to the Baptist. It is as if Jesus were feeding them in two courses, giving ample time to digest the information, before giving them more.
2. Further, had John's messengers overheard Christ's high praise for John and reported it to him, this might have tended to cancel the effectiveness of the evidence Jesus gave him. So it is best that they not hear this commendation. Many men are very tough-skinned against all manner of abuse or reviling, but have no effective defense against the negative effects of praise. They immediately puff up, their eyes swell shut, hindering them from seeing themselves objectively in light of that praise.

If Jesus' message to John contained any rebuke or suggestion that the Baptist were less praiseworthy, then Plummer's remark (*Matthew*, 161) is to the point:

In society men are commonly praised to their face or the faces of their friends, and blamed behind their backs. Jesus does the opposite. . . .

Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John . . . It was **John**, not his disciples or anyone else in particular, who had fired that explosive question. It was **John** to whom Jesus

returned a simple, conclusive answer. Now it is **John** concerning whom the Lord addresses the crowds. But why did Jesus feel He needed to speak about His herald in THIS way at THIS time?

1. Because John's question might have caused the multitudes to feel that the great prophet was having a crisis of faith if he is driven to ask this question so ambiguously full of doubt. Is John himself now failing? If so, the people would certainly be tempted to reevaluate, and perhaps even reject, John's message upon which Jesus' own mission was based. Although Jesus had refused to answer John's impatient demand directly, and although His veiled rebuke might be interpreted by some to mean that the desert preacher is no longer worthy of notice or honor, Jesus immediately corrects such a notion. Although one doubt, if strongly held, can unmake a character, and although a bossy impatience can destroy childlike trust and humble service, yet neither one doubt nor zealous impatience mean that John has fallen. Jesus leaps immediately to his defense, clearing him of unwarranted suspicion. In fact, He does more: He sought to sustain their former confidence in John and rekindle their initial admiration for him.
2. Because Jesus needed to attenuate the apparent difference between the view of John the Baptist and His own with regard to the Messiahship. The crowds, ignorant of the real relationship existing between John and Jesus (Jesus is John's Lord), might have tended to misinterpret this rift as merely the schism between two equal teachers. Jesus must now defend the God-given mission of John, show its limitation and its difference from His own mission, and then push the crowds to decide about both. Note how some of the implications of this text demand of Jesus that He possess absolute divine authority in order for Him to make the statements He does. This fact could not have escaped the notice of at least some in the crowd.
3. The impatient, somewhat critical undercurrent of the Baptist's question could not help but stimulate people to take a serious, more critical look at John or Jesus or both. Perhaps Jesus, who knows men's hearts could read the unfriendly criticism and honest puzzling written there: "Say, John's right: if Jesus be the Messiah, then why does He move forward so meekly, enduring the reviling and the murderous scheming of His enemies? And how could He leave John to rot in Herod's

dungeon; When is He going to get this Kingdom of God moving, claim the Messianic throne for Himself and begin to rule the world?" The anguished question out of this dungeon turned the multitude to examining the claims of Jesus, since the phrasing of the question concentrates all the various aspects of the mission of Jesus into one burning issue to be resolved immediately without embarrassment or hesitation. It became an instant issue to be dealt with by visible proof and cogent argument that would justify all that Jesus had been claiming for Himself. The comprehension and conscience of the people was thus thrown into crisis, since they too needed to decide about this same issue.

4. Jesus could never have deprecated the mission of John without at the same time undermining His own ministry, since John's work preparatory to Christ's coming had been perfectly valid for its purpose. Jesus came not to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them, and John was the last of the great prophets! (11:13; see on Mt. 5:17;20) John had initiated this exciting discussion by asking, in effect: "Who are you?" but Jesus fully answers this question before the multitudes by demanding, "Who is John the Baptist?" For only those who accept John the Baptist at full value can truly appreciate who Jesus is. (See on 11:14, 15)

Who was John the Baptist? While many had dismissed him from their minds as an ill-dressed, brassy-voiced, low-country evangelist, the Son of God has quite another estimate. With a mighty barrage of thought-provoking questions, He provides a strong rebuttal to any criticisms of John's person or ministry entertained by the crowds.

What went ye out into the wilderness to behold? Why did Jesus begin His message on John with a series of questions?

1. Because questions arouse in the listeners an interest in what Jesus will say later. An affirmation does not engross the attention quite so well as does a short barrage of questions. Yet, since these are rhetorical questions, Jesus is making a series of most striking observations.
2. Even though these are rhetorical questions, yet by their very nature they make the audience take a position about John and about themselves. They ask "What was it in you yourselves that prompted you to trek out into the wastelands of Judea? What was it about John that so stirred your souls?"

From Jesus' use of past tense verbs (*exēlibete*, all three times, translated "you went out") it becomes obvious that He is hammering on the folks' memory of what they saw at the time they originally went out to hear John at the Jordan River. These questions, then, refer to what John was at that time. Further, since Jesus makes no exceptions or reservations about him, He definitely implies that John never has been, or has yet become, anything else but what they have always known him to be, a towering rock of spiritual power, moral courage and unwavering godliness. It is clear that this is Jesus' evaluation. The mere fact that the Baptist is now perplexed about the program of the Master in no way reduces that estimate. The fact that he is in prison and is not whining for miraculous release as the price for his trust in Jesus re-doubles the force of this impression.

The Lord's praise for the forerunner and his work, given especially at this juncture, is excellent evidence of the authenticity of the fact itself, as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 669) has it:

He to Whom John had formerly borne testimony, now bore testimony to him; and that, not in the hour when John had testified for Him, but when his testimony had wavered and almost failed. This is the opposite of what one might expect, if the narrative had been a fiction, while it is exactly what we might expect if the narrative be true.

The Master nurtured a deep respect for His herald, ever speaking of him with generous appreciation. (Cf. Jn. 5:30-35) Bruce (*Training*, 71) comments:

John reciprocated these kindly feelings, and had no sympathy with the petty jealousies in which his disciples sometimes indulged. The two great ones, both of them censured for different reasons by their degenerate contemporaries, ever spoke of each other to their disciples and to the public in terms of affectionate respect; the lesser light magnanimously confessing his inferiority, the greater magnifying the worth of His humble fellow-servant. What a refreshing contrast was thus presented to the mean passions of envy, prejudice and detraction in other quarters, under whose malign influence men of whom better things might have been expected spoke of John as a madman, and of Jesus as immoral and profane!

But this battery of questions is most impressive. As the Lord probes for an answer, offering alternatives, He is making the multitudes answer that question: "What did you go out to see?" As a master

orator, Jesus punches out a simple outline, eliminating unworthy alternatives: "Not this, not this, but that, and even more than that." Study His outline: "Who is John the Baptist?"

1. Certainly not a fickle sychophant (v. 7)
2. Certainly not a dapper courtier living luxuriously (v. 8)
3. But rather a prophet of God (v. 9)
4. More than this, he's the personal messenger of Jahveh (v. 10)
5. He is the greatest of the race (v. 11a)
6. Transition to Jesus' revelations on the Kingdom: "Yet he's inferior to the humblest Christians." (v. 11b)

So doing, He zooms in one one major worthwhile reason for commending John. Having confirmed it, He used it as a springboard from which to launch His revelations concerning the true office and ministry of the Baptist. But before He could do this, He must assure Himself of the crowd's sharing the same footing, the same fundamental appreciation of John.

A. A CHANGELING'S CHARACTER?

His first question cracks like a rifle-shot: **a reed shaken with the wind?** Is Jesus flaying their present criticisms, doubts and worldly ambitions with withering scorn and sarcasm, or is this a calm, reasoned defense? Some take Jesus' words literally; others, metaphorically:

1. *Literally*: "You would have found many such canes out there in the desert along the Jordan River, but would a tall reed waving and bent by every wind have really so attracted your attention so fixedly as to drive you out there to see it?" Tall reeds are the most common sight along the Jordan River, but are not so marvellous as to lure crowds out into the wilderness. The very fact that people did go out proves the extraordinariness of John. People would hardly cross the street to see the kind of person they could meet any day, not to mention trekking miles through wilderness country.
2. *Figuratively*: The very fact that Jesus offers this obvious metaphor for weakness and instability indicates that He really advocates the opposite: "No, you went out into the wilderness because you expected and found a rock of a man, a giant of unswerving fidelity and moral power in the face of great personal difficulties. No fickleness of spirit would have so commanded your attention. That man dared stand firm against the Pharisees and unmasked their hypocrisy! He fearlessly

rebuked sin, though the king himself were the sinner, even when his own freedom, yes, his own life hung in the balance!"

The audience's moral sense was awakened. If John had been a man who easily yielded to popular opinion, bending with it because he has no solid convictions of his own, then why is he at this very minute down in Herod's prison? He is there because he would not compromise, because he could not shut his eyes to what the Jewish religionists had not the moral stamina to denounce and about which the silent majority stayed silent, because they were just plain afraid.

But Jesus is not merely defending John here; His attack is also aimed at the weakness and failure of the whole nation. The whole Jewish nation was made up of reeds swaying before popular currents, but John did not sway! Here is written the quality of the moral fiber of his real faith and piety. His was a non-conformity in things that count.

B. A COURTIER'S COSTUME?

11:8 **But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft raiment are in kings' houses.** While His audience is still reeling under the first salvo, Jesus rams home another. Again His words have been taken,

1. *Literally*: "You might have been attracted to the wilderness to see such a man. But let's be frank: you would not have found such a man where John was actually preaching! Dapper courtiers are to be found in kings' palaces, not in the badlands of Judea. Realistically, a wilderness pilgrimage is totally unnecessary for those who would see luxurious worldlings. You would not have had to go very far to observe pliant, flattering courtiers fawning before Herod." Jesus' sparkling figure of speech is the very antithesis of John's actual manner: his austere diet and desert dress and personal discipline, his entire renunciation of self, even in things entirely legitimate, damn the heresy that ease of living is life's highest expression and goal. With no thought for his own personal comfort or advancement, his whole life was concentrated on being a "Voice crying in the wilderness."
2. *Figuratively*: The phrases, **soft raiment, king's houses (or courts)** and **live in luxury** (Lk. 7:25), strongly suggest a person who knows the courtier's art of flattering kings whereby one secures to himself **royal favor and promotions**. The irony of Jesus' words would strike hard at the conscience of the wavering multitudes, since they had humbly and joyously

accepted John's coming and message precisely because John was NOT a yes-man for any earthly ruler. He stood head and shoulders above common man, attracting admiration because he could not be bought by royal favors. His unswerving fidelity to God and to His Word drove him as God's ambassador to take up the dangerous occupation of telling the truth to kings.

The crowd knew that John had not yielded either to the popularity craze or to the craving for luxury, riches and comfort. They also knew how many self-styled spiritual leaders were even then bending in every direction of the compass as the pressure of flattery or threats was applied to them. They also knew that pliable preachers and those craving the praise of men and the riches of the world as ultimate objectives do not end in prisons as martyrs for the truth. The collective conscience of the audience must have been deeply stirred as Jesus poured searing scorn upon their own worldly dreams, because if Jesus is (by implication) praising the very opposite of what they thought fine and worthy of their ambitions, His is a challenge to the most excruciating self-examination. Who among them did not fully expect that the Messiah Himself would be **clothed in soft raiment, live in luxury in kings' houses?** Who among them did not aspire to the same sort of treatment?

C. A COLOSSAL COMMUNICATOR

11:9 **But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet?** After eliminating other unworthy alternatives, Jesus expresses the image that was forcing itself into the mind of His hearers: a prophet! As the Jews had cried for release from their oppressors and the establishment of the Messiah's reign, they had faced the horrible possibility that God had abandoned His people, for the heavens had remained silent now for 400 years. Almost any voice that cried with the old familiar ring of the prophets could not help but cause the Hebrew pulse to race with unwonted excitement: God has again visited His people! (Cf. Lk. 1:68, 78; 7:16) They had eagerly flocked to the Jordan, knowing that "the Lord God will do nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) It stood to reason that the Almighty was about to act, for there on the banks of the Jordan stood His prophet. (See notes on 3:1-12, Vol. I)

Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. Thus, the multitudes had been correct in their estimate of John, but

they had not set their evaluation high enough. Jesus gives it as His own emphatic judgment that they had seen more than they intended to see. But how is it possible that anyone could be **more than a prophet**? Besides combining in himself all the usual functions of the prophetic office, John was assigned the task not only of prophesying about the Messiah, but also of preparing the way for Him and announcing Him to the world as having come. Jesus enlarges upon this declaration:

11:10 **This is he, of whom it is written,**

**Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way before thee.**

In short, John the Baptist is the personal herald of Jehovah Himself who will shortly appear. (Mal. 3:1—4:6) For the Hebrew in whose heart burned Malachi's words, Jesus' quiet, but terribly significant, assertion must have been His most thrilling revelation up to this point. In this restrained disclosure are inherent three assumptions:

1. Jesus Christ depends upon the divine origin and trustworthiness of the OT prophecy, citing it here as indirect proof of His own identity and direct evidence of John's. For what cannot be known today of Malachi's prophecy, we are indebted to Jesus, who does not hesitate for a moment to quote textually the ancient prophet.
2. Christ declares the exact fulfilment of Malachi's words, pointing to John the Baptist as their unique fulfilment: "**This is he!**" (See also on 11:14) Not only is predictive prophecy a possibility, but we have here a specific case in point of its actual occurrence and fulfilment.
3. Since Jesus is the One for whom John the Baptist had prepared, He hereby declares Himself to be the Lord God in Person come to His Temple. This is equivalent to a claim to deity on the part of Christ Himself.

The earth-shaking importance of this citation of Malachi's prophecy by Jesus can best be appreciated by studying the prophet's own words in their context. About them Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 456ff.) notes:

To the question, 'Where is the God of Judgment?' the Lord Himself replies that He will suddenly come to His temple, but that before His coming He will send a messenger to prepare the way for Him. The announcement of this messenger rests upon the prophecy in Isa. 40:3ff., as the expression ("prepare the way") which is borrowed from that passage, clearly shows.

The person whose voice Isaiah heard calling to make the way of Jehovah in the desert, that the glory of the Lord might be revealed to all flesh, is here described as *maleâch*, whom Jehovah will send before Him, i.e. before His coming. This *maleâch* ("messenger") is not a heavenly messenger or spiritual being . . . nor the angel of Jehovah *kat'exochên* (*par excellence*), who is mentioned afterwards and called *maleâch babberith*, but an earthly messenger of the Lord, and indeed the same who is called the prophet Elijah in ver. 23 (4:5 in some versions), and therefore not "an ideal person, viz. the whole choir of divine messengers, who are to prepare the way for the coming of salvation, and open the door for the future grace" (Hengstenburg) but a concrete personality—messenger who was really sent to the nation in John the Baptist immediately before the coming of the Lord. The ideal view is precluded not only by the historical fact, that not a single prophet arose in Israel during the whole period between Malachi and John, but also by the context of the passage before us, according to which the sending of the messenger was to take place immediately before the coming of the Lord to His temple. . . .

Preparing the way (an expression peculiar to Isaiah: cf. Isa. 40:3; 57:14 and 62:10) by clearing away impediments lying in the road, denotes the removal of all that retards the coming of the Lord to His people, i.e. the taking away of enmity to God and of ungodliness by the preaching of repentance and the conversion of sinners. The announcement of this messenger therefore implied, that the nation in its existing moral condition was not yet prepared for the reception of the Lord, and therefore had no ground for murmuring at the delay of the manifestation of the divine glory, but ought rather to murmur at its own sin and estrangement from God. When the way shall have been prepared, the Lord will suddenly come. . . . The Lord (*h'âdôn*) is God; this is evident both from the fact that He comes to *His* temple, i.e. the temple of Jehovah, and also from the relative clause "whom ye seek," which points back to the question, "Where is the God of judgment?" (ch. 2:17). . . . This promise was fulfilled in the coming of Christ, in whom the angel of the covenant, the Logos, became flesh, and in the sending of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Him.

With the coming of the Lord the judgment will also begin; not the judgment upon the heathen, however, for which the ungodly nation was longing, but the judgment upon the godless members of the covenant nation. . . .

But compare Malachi's original words with the uniform NT quotation of them (Mal. 3:1; Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 7:27):

Malachi:

Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.

New Testament

Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee.

While it may be true (and should be noticed therefore) that all the Synoptics concur on this rendering independent of either the Hebrew text or the LXX, as if they were citing a popular form of this prophecy extant in no manuscript remaining to our time, this version of Malachi's words is interpretative. The interpretation in the mouth of Christian Apostles is not suspect, however, and could be perfectly Jewish and stereotyped in this form long before the Evangelists made use of it.

The reason for this is obvious and commonplace in prophecy: what Jehovah does through agents He may be said to do for Himself: In Malachi's prophecy God Himself prepares to come in judgment to Israel. But even in the Hebrew text (represented in our English versions) Malachi represents God as changing from first person singular, "I," "my," and "me," to the third person singular: "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." To the attentive reader, Jewish or Christian, this change may mean a distinction in personages between the God who intends to reveal Himself and the actual Person through whom He makes Himself known. (Study what appears to be a similar case in Ezek. 34:11-24) Therefore, in light of the distinction in Persons between Jehovah who inhabits eternity and His actual manifestation in time, a Jewish scholar might read back into God's words the proper personal pronouns that would clarify that distinction. Further, since this interpretative translation is particularly irreprehensible in view of the distinction between the Persons of Jesus the Son and God the Father, a distinction borne out in the fulfillment of

the prophecy in question, the Christian Evangelists would find this popular rendering especially suitable

The change of wording bears the stamp of approval of inspired men who quote Malachi's words ONLY in this form, providing thus one more evidence for the conclusion we already knew from many other sources: "The coming of Christ is the coming of God."

11:11 **Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Among them that are born of women,** as Plummer (*Luke*, 205) has it, is "a solemn periphrase for the whole human race." (Cf. Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4) Who are the real giants of this world? Kings? Generals? Statesmen? Philosophers? How differently God measures the greatness of a man! History, too, gauges a man quite differently. Who would have ever heard of Herod today, had he not laid violent hands on John the Baptist. Pilate, too, would have been a non-entity, had he not been partially responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ. Further, had the Lord Himself polled His audience that day, seeking their responses to the one question, "Whom do you consider to be the greatest man who have ever lived?" the replies would have exhausted the pages of OT history: "Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel!" However significant a role those men may have played in the scenes of the history of God's revelation, God's Son places the laurel on another brow. His decision is final and inclusive: **There hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.** In the estimate of earth's Judge, John is the greatest of the race, greater even than the prophets ("more than a prophet") But in what sense?

1. Certainly not absolutely, since Jesus proceeds immediately to amend His seemingly universal declaration. And, if our interpretation of 11:12-15 be correct, then the Lord limits John's superiority to great men who lived before the Cross. Of those, then, he is relatively the greatest.
2. His personal character was positively noteworthy; humble, self-denying and courageous. God's interest in John is a specimen of real piety and practical zeal for righteousness indicates that He is not so much interested in counting men, as in finding men who will count! In seeking men who can be what John was, God might be paraphrased as saying, "I would that I had as many soldiers as I have men!" Though the Father is not willing that any should perish, and so is pleased with numbers of godly men, yet His heart is touched by the con-

centrated power of a singleminded individual whose whole life stands out in a wilderness of indifferentism, unbelief and doubt, and who is willing to spend his whole life in God's service, calling men back to God.

3. John's superiority also lay in the function he performed in the Messianic planning. His was the unique glory of being the immediate forerunner of the Messiah. Though a great prophet like Moses and Elijah, he not only prophesied, but lived to see and point out to others the Messiah of whom he had spoken.

Note how calmly Jesus waves aside all other judgments, all other pretenders to the claim of human greatness. A man would have to be God to dare pinpoint a decision so precise, so historically justifiable as this! Jesus' judgments are so much more striking, because He does not often append to them a bald, apologetic statement of His right to make them. He simply acts in character as earth's Judge, letting His signs identify to men His right to say what He does. (However, study John 5 where He outlines the evidence of His divine authority to judge.)

Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. This bewildering amendment, attached to the foregoing encomium, is a beautiful paradox and deliberately calculated to keep His audience seeking its meaning for a long time to come. Our vantage point on this side of the Cross, the empty Tomb and Pentecost not only removes the mystery in His apparent inconsistency, but also proves the truth of His assertion. Three major questions need clarification:

1. What phase of **the kingdom of heaven** is meant here?
 - a. If by the **kingdom of heaven** (or *of God*) we mean "the rule of God," then in no sense can John the Baptist be excluded from **the kingdom**, and it becomes nonsense to say that he was never in the kingdom, having died before its inception, for there never was a servant of God who more embodied the fundamental principle of humble service to God, upon which **the kingdom of heaven** was founded. But the antithesis of Jesus must be sought elsewhere than in this sense, because John's greatness is obviously contrasted with that of the most insignificant person **in the kingdom**, a contrast that cannot help but suggest that, in some special sense, John is not to be considered as being **in the kingdom**.

- b. The **kingdom of heaven**, of which Jesus here speaks, is metonymy on a grand scale, the cause put for the effect. The Church of Jesus Christ is the highest earthly expression of the Government of God, so that one might well say that, wherever the Church goes, there is the Kingdom of God in action. While no thoughtful person will confuse the Church for the Kingdom, yet there is this important, undeniable sense in which the whole program of Jesus Christ, otherwise known as His Church, may, indeed, must be called **the kingdom of heaven**. Since, in this sense, **the kingdom** was established on the Day of Pentecost (see notes on Mt. 16:18, 19, 28; cf. Lk. 19:11; 24:46-49; Ac. 1:3-8; 2:1-42; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; Col. 1:13 etc.), then John would not, of course, have lived to participate in what would be the common privileges of anyone **in the kingdom**.
2. Who is **he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven**?
- a. Some have suggested that Jesus refers to Himself. Accordingly, He would be seen as describing Himself as someone who was then less important than John, but who would soon appear in His true glory, hence far more important than he, when He would have revealed Himself as the King. Objection to this view arises from the fact that at Jesus' baptism, John himself recognized the immeasurable superiority of the Lord by yielding to His requests. Further, John consistently proclaimed Jesus' Lordly preeminence. (Mt. 3:11, 12; Jn. 1:26-34; 3:28-36) Jesus' own position is not at issue here.
- b. Jesus is talking about His own disciples, those who would live to participate in the privileges and enjoy the joyous revelations that would be the common possession of any Christian.
3. How is it possible for John to be inferior to the humblest Christian?
- a. His inferiority is not calculated in reference to his personal confidence in Jesus or dependence upon God, as if he were to be thought of as a man of vacillating faith merely because of his impatient question sent to Jesus. The problem here centers not around his faith but upon his function, his position in the messianic scheme of things.

- b. Plummer (*Luke*, 205) states the principle of distinction best: "The lower members of a higher class are above the highest members of a lower class." The contrasts between the class to which John belongs and that of which Christians are members may be set forth thus;

John the Baptist:	Any Christian
—lived and died in the era of preparation for the coming of the Christ;	—Lives and dies in the era of realization of the prophets' messages in a present Christ;
—Lived as a servant of God; Was the Bridegroom's friend;	—Lives as a son of God; Is the Bride of Christ;
—For all his reflection, could not fathom truths hinted to him by prophetic insight;	—Grasps these truths as elementary knowledge and as part of being a Christian;
—Lived under the law and dispensation of Moses	—Lives under the reign of grace, superior spiritual privileges

So the interesting paradox is true: "He that is less than John is greater than John." John, though a prophet of the Almighty, hence, because of this office or function, would be more highly regarded than the common godly man, yet, because he was fated to surrender his life before the new era of the risen Christ, he would not be privileged to know the advantages of even the humblest Christian. It is as McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 283) has it: "The least born of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:12, 13; 3:5) is greater than the greatest born of women", who, for whatever hindering reason, does not know the most elementary principles of the Kingdom of God. All believers in Christ now know the great treasures of revelation given to them by God, because anyone who has lived this side of Pentecost knows of Jesus' great victories over disease, death, and the Devil. They know of His accession to the throne of God and coming in glory. Only in this sense may it be said that we have clearer comprehension of the Kingdom of God than any of the ancient prophets or even John himself. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 7) puts this succinctly:

What is it that the Christian has that John could never have? . . . John had never seen the Cross, and therefore

one thing John could never know was the full revelation of the love of God. The holiness of God he might know; the justice of God he might declare; but the love of God in all its fulness he could never know. . . . It is possible for us to know more about the heart of God than Isaiah or Jeremiah or any other of that godly company. The man who has seen the Cross has seen the heart of God in a way that no man who lived before the Cross could ever see it . . .

IV. CHRIST'S CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE KINGDOM

(11:12-15)

At this point in His sermon on John, Jesus turns slightly aside from defending John to make appropriate observations about the kingdom of heaven just mentioned (11:11). He seems to be answering the burning question: If John the Baptist is so important a prophet, being the very Herald of the Messiah and harbinger of the Kingdom of God, then how is the time-schedule proceeding with the actual establishment of the Kingdom? To this question Jesus responds, in general, that this is a turbulent period for God's Kingdom due to the violent misunderstanding of the true nature of the Kingdom and its King, but since the Messiah's forerunner has already appeared (see on 11:14), the Messiah Himself cannot be too far behind, and with Him the kingdom comes.

11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force. Two views are generally held regarding Jesus' meaning:

1. In a good sense, only violent men could gain entrance to, or possession of the Kingdom of God, i.e., men who seek it with burning zeal and having found it, force their way into it. (Cf. Lk. 16:16; see Arndt-Gingrich, *biázō* for bibliography.) They give all they have to enter it, a struggle that is viewed favorably by the King.
 - a. On the phrase *hē basileia tōn ouranōn biázetai*, it should be remarked in favor of this view that the verb *biázomai*, when taken as a
 - (1) transitive passive verb, may be interpreted in a good sense to mean "the kingdom of heaven is sought with burning zeal." (Arndt-Gingrich, 140)
 - (2) intransitive verb, may be translated: "the kingdom makes its way with triumphant force." (Arndt-

Gingrich, 140) despite hindrances of every sort which are raised against it.

- b. Lenski (*Matthew*, 437) sees John and Jesus as the agents (*biastai*) who forcefully bring forward the Kingdom:

The correspondence between *biazetai* and *biastai* is obvious, being a play on words. The energy and the force with which the kingdom comes (or is brought) instills a similar energy and force in those whom the kingdom wins for itself. They are not 'forceful' by nature and thus better than others; but the kingdom itself with all its gifts, treasures and blessings puts power and courage into them 'to snatch' . . . it all . . . The trend of the entire discourse deals, not with violence against the kingdom, but with the indifference and the dis-satisfaction that hinder men from entering it with zest.

2. In a bad sense, the Kingdom actually suffers (undesireable) violence, is violently treated, contrary to the will or desires of the King.
- a. This comes about through hindrances raised against its establishment and continuation. Jesus would be saying, "There will always be wicked men who struggle to seize control of and destroy my Kingdom through violence." (Cf. Mt. 16:18, 21; Jn. 16:1-4)
- b. This comes about through the efforts of unauthorized persons who mistakenly imagined that its coming could be compelled by force, as, for example, the Zealots and all who ultimately sympathized with their philosophy of military overthrow and rule by the sword. (That the Zealots had many sympathizers is most clearly seen in the reasonable supposition that had not the Zealots represented such a strong popular undercurrent of political feeling they would not have been able to carry the nation with them in their last bid for political independence that so disastrously ended in the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Israel.) Although the Master could comprehend the impetuous, excited thronging about Him of multitudes full of preconceived ideas about the Messiah and His kingdom, and although He recognized in their eagerness as much unhealthy fanaticism as deep conviction, yet His under-

standing did not blind Him to the need to take steps to counteract the violence these impassioned disciples were doing to His Kingdom. Count the times He had to avoid the crowds and strictly forbade any publicity of His healings. (Cf. Mt. 8:4; 9:30; 14:22 with Jn. 6:15; Mk. 1:34, 37, 38, 45; 3:12; 6:43; 8:36, etc.) **The kingdom of God suffered violence when men of violence took it by force**, much as would a bud suffer at the hands of a person who in his eagerness to experience its fragrance tries with his fingers to force it to bloom. Was John the Baptist even now himself trying to force the Kingdom by means of his impatient question?

- c. This could come about by the efforts of men who try to effect an entrance into the Kingdom on their own terms, while ignoring the will of the King. (Cf. Jn. 10:1ff.) This is the perpetual attitude of men who, however unconscious, nevertheless in practice, say, "We will not have this man to reign over us." When Luke (16:16) quotes Jesus: "And every one enters it violently" (*kai pás eis autên bidzetai*), the "everyone" (*pás*) cannot mean, contrary to Plummer (*Luke*, 389), everyone in contrast to Jewish exclusiveness. This is rather a hyperbole for the great majority of people who are deeply interested in the Kingdom for a multitude of wrong reasons. They are simply trying to fashion the kingdom after their own preconceived notions and create the King in their own image.

Perhaps it is neither important nor necessary to choose between these two views.

Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 9) attempts a harmony of these two concepts:

"Always my Kingdom will suffer violence; always savage men will try to break it up and snatch it away and destroy it; and therefore only the man who is desperately in earnest, only the man in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter into it." It may well be that this saying of Jesus was originally at one and the same time a warning of violence to come and a challenge to produce a devotion which would be even stronger than the violence.

A. B. Bruce (*PHC*, XXII, 275ff.) extends his harmonic attempt even further:

The storming of the kingdom.—In employing words suggesting the idea of violence, Jesus, though certainly not intending to express personal disapproval, did mean to point at features of the new movement which made it an object of aversion, astonishment, or at least of doubt, to others. It may be well to particularize some aspects of the work of the kingdom which would, not unnaturally wear an aspect of violence to minds not able to regard them with Christ's eyes, though to Christ Himself they were the bright and hopeful side of an evil time.

- I. We may mention, first, that which most readily occurs to one's thoughts, viz. the passionate earnestness with which men sought to get into the kingdom, heralded by John and preached by Jesus; an earnestness not free from questionable elements, as few popular enthusiasms are; associated with misconceptions of the nature of the kingdom, and, in many cases, fervent rather than deep, therefore likely to prove transient — still a powerful, impressive, august movement of the human soul Godwards. (See Luke 16:16 RV)
- II. From the volcanic bursting forth of religious earnestness in the popular mind, we may naturally pass to speak of another respect in which the kingdom of heaven may be said to have suffered violence, viz. the kind of people that had most prominently to do with it.—Publicans, sinners, harlots, the moral scum and refuse of society, such were the persons, who in greatest numbers were pressing into the kingdom, to the astonishment and scandal of respectable, "righteous," religious, well-conducted, and self-respecting people. Why it was a *revolution*, society turned upside down, as great an overturn in principle, if not in extent, as when in France, in the eighteenth century, bishops, aristocrats, princes and kings were sent adrift, and sans-culottism reigned triumphant, believing itself to be in possession of a veritable kingdom of God. What wonder if wise and prudent ones looked on in wistful, doubting mood, and sanctimonious men held up their hands in pious horror, and exclaimed, Call you this a kingdom of God? Blasphemy!
- III. The kingdom of God as it actually showed itself in connection with the work of Christ, differed widely from,

did violence, we may say, to preconceived notions of what it would be.—Not a few of those who actually entered the kingdom, in so far as they understood its true character, had to do violence to their own prejudices before they took the step. There were conversions, not unaccompanied with inward pain, not merely from sin to righteousness, but from ideals mistaken to rectified notions of the kingdom of God, from political dreams, noble, but destined never to be fulfilled, to spiritual realities.

IV. The kingdom of heaven may be said to have suffered violence in so far as its coming was promoted by the use of irregular methods and agencies.—In this respect John and Jesus were themselves stormers, though in different ways, to the scandalizing of a custom-ridden generation. Let us make one or two reflections, suggested by the saying we have been studying, concerning Him who uttered it.

1. It is very evident that the one who spoke thus had a very clear conception of the deep significance of the movement denoted by the phrase: "the kingdom of heaven." Christ knew well that a new world was beginning to be.
2. How calmly He takes it all.
3. Yet how magnanimously He bears Himself towards the doubters. "Violence"—the very word is an excuse for their doubts.

If, without violence to Jesus' original thought, we may reverse the order of verses 12 and 13, and we have an interesting revelation:

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.

The justification for this reversal lies in Jesus' use of the word **for** which serves to introduce the rational basis for His previous assertion, hence, logically, comes first in His mind. Jesus reveals an important time-relationship here: "**until John . . . from the days of John until now.**" **Prophesied** means that the **Law and Prophets** spoke authoritatively for God, revealing His message to Israel. The era of the **Law and Prophets** finds its culmination and fulfillment in the ministry of John, the last of the great prophets, who prepares

the ground for a completely new, *different* age, that of the Messiah. Luke (16:16) on this same subject, wrote:

The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently.

Be this an exact parallel or not, this is the finest interpretation of our text. **The days of John the Baptist** are no longer a period of "prophesying" in the classical sense, i.e. predictive description of great events in the distant future, because John's appearance ushered in a transition period of announcement of the near arrival of the Kingdom of God itself. **Until John**, as a phrase describing the authoritative prophetic revelations of the mind of God, marks a definite end to this function, inasmuch as that for which **all the prophets and the law** had made preparation, has now begun to arrive. Luke's expression (Lk. 16:16) must mean, then, that John's revelations and Jesus' preaching (prior to His ascension) were intended to be a description of the nature and citizenship of the Kingdom and the identification of the King, since the actual ascension to the throne of God did not take place during Jesus' earthly sojourn. Throughout the ministry of Jesus we will notice various occasions on which Jesus made drastic, far-reaching changes in fundamental concepts that were integral parts of Mosaic Law. (See on 9:14-17; 12:1-14; cf. Mk. 7:19; Jn. 4:21-24) Further, when He fulfilled the predictions of the prophets, He took all the uncertainty from their meaning, and removed all of the expectancy created by their searching the future. All their shadowy references, when concentrated in Him who is their entire fulfillment, need be heeded no further as if some other Christ should come, identical to Jesus. So, with the fulfillment of the great purposes and predictions of **all the prophets and the law** came to a brilliant, successful conclusion their ministry as the (until then) unique revealers of God. Nevertheless, their functions did overlap with the ministry of Jesus and early life of the Church for two important reasons:

1. Jesus' establishment of the new rule of God, the Kingdom of God, the Church, did not take place until the coming of the Holy Spirit. (See Mt. 28:19, 20; Lk. 24:46-47; Ac. 1:3-8; and the special study "The Coming of the Son of Man" after Matthew 10) Therefore His own ministry took place during the last days of the old era.
2. Even after the clear revelation of Jesus' coronation and the vindication of His rule, still many did not grasp the reality that the old system of the Law and the accrued traditions

were completely done away. The Epistles bear witness to this confusion in the mind of many people both within and outside the Church.

This "change in administration" from that of the Law and prophets to that of the Messiah Himself is not so surprising, since such a change would have been expected by the Jews, even though they would have visualized this change in terms of Jewish categories, even as we expect heaven to reflect the limited knowledge represented in our Christian categories. This Jewish expectation is reflected in the nature of the argument Jesus offers next.

G. C. Morgan (*Matthew*, 114) makes the interesting suggestion that this expression (11:13) is intended as further explication of the superior greatness of the least in the kingdom of God. The prophets and the law, including John's ministry, represented a ministry of anticipation, not one of personal experience of the things prophesied. Just five minutes of real experience of the thing awaited is worth so much more than all the centuries of anticipating it. So it is that anyone, even the most hesitant beginner in the Kingdom walks in more actual light that was available in all the long centuries before Jesus completed His revelation. There were facts that the Law, prophets and John could not know, methods they could not fathom, primarily due to their individual position in the progress of the revelation up to their time.

11:14 And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. In this seemingly obscure verse, lying half-hidden among so much more famous material, rests the most fundamental issue of real religion and, ultimately, the judgment of the race: **if you are willing to receive it.** The willingness to be taught is the key of this entire chapter, the crux of John's problem, (11:1-6) the failure of the Jewish people in general (11:16-19) and the favored cities in particular (11:20), and finally, the only way to grasp God's revelation (11:25-30). Teachableness is not a matter of the understanding as though the meaning of the revelation were unclear, but a question of the will. (Jn. 5:40; 7:17; Mt. 23:37; Rev. 22:17d) **If ye are willing** cannot mean that Jesus' audience could take His revelation or leave it without serious consequences, as if this declaration did not much matter. Jesus merely challenges their willingness to face the truth hereby introduced. Many would be most unwilling. But the Lord did not force them to acknowledge these truths against their will. But He warns them against neglecting this manifest fulfillment of prophecy, for, having made their choice they must then

face the consequences thereof. So, it matters very much how they decide, as 11:15 demonstrates.

This is Elijah, that is to come. Reference here is Malachi's prediction (3:1; 4:5, 6) that, in a period destitute of faith and true fear of Jehovah, God would raise up a prophet who would lead the ungodly generation back to the God of the fathers. The appearance of this great prophet must shortly precede some "great and terrible day of the Lord" who will come with terrible judgment upon the nation. But Malachi named that great messenger "Elijah the prophet." It was at this point that the Jewish interpreter's problem arose: does Malachi mean that Elijah himself, who had been caught up to heaven, would personally reappear on earth, or that someone else who because of his power and energy with which that future prophet would labor, would call to mind the vigorous old Tishbite? Is Malachi speaking literally or metaphorically? ("That coming prophet will be another 'Elijah.'") Most of the rabbis had apparently opted for the literal interpretation. (Cf. Jn. 1:21; Mt. 17:10) For a rapid survey of rabbinic traditions about Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, see Edersheim's *Life*, Vol. II, Appendix VIII, 706ff. The apologetic nature of Edersheim's article renders it extremely valuable in that he shows the wide divergence between the commonly held Jewish views about the coming Elijah, and the actual Christian Elijah seen in John the Baptist. This divergency of theory and reality once more demonstrates the fundamental difference between Judaism and the true origins of the message and views of Christ. Though Christianity was born in the bosom of Judaism, the secret of her life lay in her divine message from God, not in the perfection here and there of rabbinic views. But that the literal view was not necessary, is illustrated by Keil (*Minor Prophets*, II, 471ff.):

But this view is proved to be erroneous by such passages as Hosea 3:5; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24, and Jer. 30:9, where the sending of David the king as the true shepherd of Israel is promised. Just as in these passages we cannot think of the return or resurrection of the David who had long been dead; but a king is meant who will reign over the nation of God in the mind and spirit of David; so the Elijah to be sent can only be a prophet with the spirit or power of Elijah the Tishbite. The second David was indeed to spring from the family of David, because to the seed of David there had been promised the eternal possession of the throne. The prophetic calling, on the other hand, was not hereditary in the

prophet's house, but rested solely upon divine choice and endowment with the Spirit of God; and consequently by Elijah we are not to understand a lineal descendent of the Tishbite, but simply a prophet in whom the spirit and power of Elijah are revived.

Keil's argument is not conclusive, since he argues from analogy, but the value of an argument from analogy is that it shows the possible existence of what seems to be a parallel case, which, in turn, should have teased Jewish minds into looking for other, different evidence that would prove the figurative nature of the great Elijah prophecy.

In all fairness to the Jews it must be remembered that God might not have given any other evidence that would have solved the quandry before its actual fulfillment with the appearance of John. Also, if the rabbinic representatives from Jerusalem knew John the Baptist's personal name to be "John," then why did they ask him if he were "Elijah"? (Cf. Jn. 1:21) Did they suppose him to have two names, the one commonly known to all, the other to be revealed at some future moment? Their question, as interpreted by John himself, cannot be construed as a concession to the figurative view, since he obviously understands them to mean, "Are you Elijah in person come back to earth in the flesh?" and answers them accordingly.

He is Elijah (*autōs estin Elias*), not literally, but indeed the person intended by Malachi. The angel who announced John's conception promised: "He will go before (the Lord their God) in the spirit and power of Elijah." (Lk. 1:17) With this dramatic assertion Jesus intends to say two things:

1. Malachi's prediction has been fulfilled. Any argument that Jesus could not be the Messiah, based on the assumption that Elijah must first come before the appearance of the Christ and that he had not done so, is hereby rendered invalid. The long-awaited Elijah had indeed come in the person and ministry of John the Baptist.
2. As a necessary consequence of this fulfillment of the great Elijah prophecy by John, the Kingdom of God must shortly appear in the person of the Christ Himself who would usher in the Messianic age. Further, since John's great question had centered around the identity and mission of the Messiah and Jesus' answer clustered together proofs of His divine identity

in the works of the Messiah, Jesus' audience should have been able to conclude, without His asserting it, that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, and should therefore be believed for what He says about the Kingdom.

So it was that the coming of John presaged the conclusion of the OT era, since the Messiah was sure to be right behind the appearance of the coming "Elijah."

But to take John seriously by recognizing him as the Elijah predicted by Malachi would mean that people would have to admit John's right to preach his unwelcome truth. Not only had he demanded repentance and conduct consistent with it, not only had he denied that physical descent from Abraham could give special rights to admission into God's Kingdom, but he had distinctly pointed out Jesus as God's Son, God's Lamb to take away the world's sin. So, to take John seriously demands of the multitudes that they take Jesus seriously.

11:15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. This exclamation implies the willful guilt of people whose ears were made to hear and understand what Jesus had been saying, but were deliberately inattentive. Sensing how much would instantly be lost through inattention and how much trouble afterwards the Jews would bring upon themselves by not having listened to Him, the Lord pleads with them to fix these ideas firmly in mind. This psychological attention-getter is good oratory, but more than this, it is a passionate cry for a hearing, arising as it does in the breast of Israel's truest Son. He sees not only the immediate information drain that their neglect of His revelation would foster. He could discern the outcome that only the final judgment would reveal.

This is amply demonstrated by the fact that Luke (7:29, 30) inserts here the following theological comment:

When they heard *this* all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John; but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Two small problems of interpretation arise:

1. Is this a parenthetical remark by the Evangelist himself, inserted into the middle of Christ's words without any indication that it is a comment of Luke's own, or is this a part of Christ's message on John? The remark itself seems to begin as a mere historical notice, but almost instantly becomes highly theological, too theological, in fact, to be merely a historical allusion

reported by Luke. Further, there is no possible way of excising it from Jesus' own words, inasmuch as Luke uses no device so to distinguish it. Because of its meaning, it fits admirably into Jesus' own argument.

2. What is the exact historical allusion here? What was it that the people heard? When did they hear it? And when did they justify God? In answer it should be noticed that in Luke's Greek sentence, no object is specified (*kaì pás ho laòs akousas kaì hoi telónai edikaíōsan . . .*), being left to be supplied by seeing what caused the people to act as they did. The question as to the time when they heard it is also relative to their obedience by which they justified God, i.e. when they were baptized by John.

All the people, the tax collectors, the harlots (see Mt. 21:31, 32) on the one hand, the Pharisees and the lawyers on the other—all had heard the preaching of the Baptist. For the former, their accepting John's message and his baptism meant their acknowledgement of God's justice in making these claims upon them. For the latter, their haughty refusal to repent meant the frustration of God's purpose to save them by granting them the opportunity to repent. God's counsel had been delivered by his humble servant John, but the proud Pharisees had, in their rejection of the servant, also rejected John's Lord and there would be no escaping His wrath. (Mt. 21:31, 32; 23:33)

This passage, while coming before the stated conclusion of this section ("Wisdom is justified by her deeds"), surely serves as a fitting illustration and commentary upon that principle. Those who had rejected John could justify themselves and their conduct by the slander that no thinking man would follow a mad-man like John. Likewise, they were able to dismiss Jesus, justifying themselves all the while. (Ironically, those who accepted God's messenger are described as "justifying God!") In each case they considered the results of their decisions to be satisfactory, since in neither case did they have to make any changes in their present conduct. Unfortunately, however, it is possible for the pragmatic test to fail badly, especially if one decides on the workability of a given conclusion before all the evidence is in. Worse yet, thinking that all the evidence has been weighed, when in reality one has seen only a small portion of it, will deceive one into relaxing, confident of his own wisdom. But the far-sighted Lord looks into the judgments of eternity and declares the final verdict on these choices made on earth: "The people, the tax collectors justified God;

the Pharisees and lawyers rejected and frustrated the purpose of God for themselves!" (Cf. Prov. 12:15; "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." In the long run, who were the wise here?) It is just better not to be so "wise in (our) own eyes" (Rom. 12:16b), i.e. so sure of our own conclusions that we no longer remain open to correction by the force of the evidence that is offered us to cause us to change. The so-called "ignorant masses," the notorious sinners admitted that God was right, knew that they needed whole-souled moral reformation and did what was necessary to begin it. They did not choke on their respectability and rationalizations, as did the learned doctors of the law. Jesus' observation merely puts into words John's experience (and that of any other experienced personal evangelist): "One just cannot save those who, determinedly unaware of their peril, refuse to be rescued."

V. CHRIST CONDEMNS THE CONTRARY CRITICS' CONTEMPTUOUS CARICATURES (11:16-19)

A master speaker, Jesus outlines this portion of His message on John thus: First, He describes a picture easily understood by any parent or child in His audience, making a brief parable of it by saying, "This generation is like this." Next, the Lord supplies two antithetic illustrations of the parable's meaning. Concluding this portion of His message, He enunciates a principle that not only rightly concludes the foregoing remarks, but also becomes a subtle warning to those who were guilty of repeating the very insults Jesus brings into the open here. The principle becomes also the test by which any man who has not yet decided about John and Jesus may come to a right conclusion.

A. A CAMEO (11:16, 17)

11:16 And whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places, who call unto their fellows and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn. The cameo-like quality of this illustration lies in the fact that Jesus drew the outline of the features clearly while leaving the details, depth and dimension somewhat unclear and puzzling. His meaning is clear: "You people are impossible to satisfy, since you do not recognize the divine wisdom under which John and I follow different manners of life and work, but in both cases our diverse methods of operation are certain to be justified by the end result of each." Interpreters have puzzled over which group of children represent the men of **this generation** and

which represent John and Jesus, as well as the resultant meaning of the refusal to play the games suggested. It is generally presumed that verses 18 and 19 are Jesus' own application of this germ-parable, since He begins the application with a conjunction used to express cause, inference, or to explain: *For* (*gàr*). But Jesus' order in those verses must be noticed, since He mentions John first and then Himself. Is the Lord Himself following a normal order, applying the first part of His parable, then the second, or is He, on the other hand, reversing the application hence, using a chiasmic order? Graphically, the problem is this:

REGULAR ORDER	
The story:	Application:
The Jews pipe; John did not dance	John was ascetic; Jews re-jected him
The Jews wailed; Jesus did not mourn	Jesus was normal; Jews re-jected Him
CHIASTIC ORDER	
The story:	Application:
The Jews did not dance; when Jesus piped	John was ascetic; Jews re-jected him
The Jews did not mourn; when John wailed	Jesus was normal; Jews re-jected Him

The problem is just when do we apply the chiasm to determine Jesus' meaning behind His story? Do we take His application and use it to interpret the parts of His story, even if it requires a chiasmic order? Or do we interpret first the story and then go on to Jesus' application? Or, to put the problem another way, who is doing the piping and to whom? who wails and to whom? There are two groups of children who try to suggest games to their playmates (Cf. Matthew's *tôis betérois* and Luke's *allélois*). Which children are here blamed by Jesus? Commentators suggest two ways:

1. Following the normal order of the text, the neighborhood children playing in the square, who pettishly criticize their companions, are the Jews. John had come to them with his severe mode of life and his stern call to repentance, but they demand that he drop his austerity and join them in the gaity

of festive occasions. When it became clear that he refused to surrender his ascetic severity, they petulantly nag him: "We piped to you and you did not dance!" Accordingly, when Jesus appeared among them as a normal individual with a wholesome enjoyment of life, who could delight in a pleasant meal and relish the company of any person, the Jews contended that He ought to be playing at funerals, i.e. fasting (cf. 9:14), rigorous Sabbath observance (cf. 12:1-14; Jn. 5:1-18), etc. But when He maintained His own course, they howl: "We wailed and you did not mourn!"

a. This interpretation offers two advantages:

- (1) It sees **the men of this generation** (cf. Lk. 7:31), i.e. the Jews, as the fickle children who complain and are not satisfied to let others follow their own chosen course.
- (2) It also lists the two objections in chronological order, not only in order of Jesus' application (11:18, 19), but also in order of John's and Jesus' actual appearance on the scene in Israel.

b. But this interpretation ignores the fact that "ye" and "you" in the mouth of the children is plural, hence, out of place when directed only at John alone and then at Jesus alone, unless the children's plural "ye" refers to John and Jesus as a group of two, while the specific complaints refer first to the one and then the other. Consider Edersheim's (*Life*, I, 670) comment:

The children of that generation expected quite another Elijah and quite another Christ, and disbelieved and complained, because the real Elijah and Christ did not meet their foolish thoughts. . . . 'We have expected Messianic glory and national exaltation, and ye have not responded ('we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced'); we have looked for deliverance from our national sufferings, and they stirred not your sympathies nor brought your help ('we have mourned to you, and ye have not lamented.')

Or, if we may not read so much into the children's expressions as Edersheim feels to be there, at least we may hear them complaining to God's messengers as a group,

first to John and then to Jesus. This would allow the plural to stand.

2. Following the chiasitic order (i.e. applying first what came second in the story, and what came first, second, thus forming an "X" or Greek *Chi*, rather than parallels), we see the children, who suggest to the others to play with them first joyously and also at mournful games, stand for Jesus and John. Their fellows, who contrarily resist becoming involved in either game are the Jews who follow the lead of their own religious hierarchy. (Cf. Lk. 7:29, 30) The quoted words then become those of John and Jesus, taken as a committee of two, representing God's call to righteousness: "Whatever our approach—whether deep-felt sorrow for sin or the joyous freedom of the Gospel—you refused both."

a. This interpretation has

- (1) the advantage of harmonizing more satisfactorily the plural pronouns, *we* and *you*, since they much more suitably describe two well-defined groups, whereas the other view tries to apply these plurals to individuals.
- (2) the advantage of reflecting the historic facts involved. It is McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 285) who notes that it was

God in His messengers—His prophets and His Son—who came to set the world right. It was these messengers who took the initiative and who demanded the changes. It was the people who sulked and refused to comply with the divine overtures. The whole tenor of Christ's teaching—the parables of the suppers, etc.—represents the Jews as being invited and refusing the invitation. It was John and Jesus who preached repentance, but there is no instance where any called on them to (change) . . .

- (3) Though the story does not follow the chronological appearance of first John, and then Jesus, as does the application in either view (11:18, 19), it may be urged that chronological order might not have been uppermost in Jesus' mind anyway. Thus, He presented Himself first in the story, but second in the application, placing John second in the story but first

application. The reason for this emphasis on Himself is to be found in the fact that the question of the day is "Are you the Christ—or do we expect another?" and "Blessed is he who is not offended in me." Jesus will conclude this message by drawing maximum attention to Himself, to His identity and ministry to the whole race.

- b. The disadvantage of this view is that, while it has been astutely argued by McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 285) that "Jesus means that the men of this generation are like the *entire picture* presented and does not intend that they shall be taken as the subjects of the leading verbs of the sentence," yet this is not what Luke wrote. The version of Luke clearly asserts that "they (the men of this generation) are like children seated in the agora." (Lk. 7:32) Is it proper under this latter view to exclude John and Jesus from that comprehensive phrase "the men of this generation"? To include them in the meaning of this phrase would indeed free the true meaning of this story from appearing to be at variance with its opening words. Under either view, Jesus and John are two of the "children seated in the agora." Even McGarvey admits that Jesus and John were the children who urged their companions to join them first in dances and then in dirges. Since it is highly unlikely that Jesus would have included Himself and John among the men of **this generation**, in light of His usual condemnation of this group (cf. Mt. 12:39, 41, 45; 16:4; 17:17; [23:36; 24:34?]; Mk. 8:38; 9:19; Lk. 9:41; 11:29-32; 17:25; see also Ac. 2:40; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 3:10), one would wonder how it be justifiable to think of His having included Himself here. The answer may be that the **men of this generation** create the same sort of situation as that faced by children playing in the marketplace who scold their fickle playmates.

Despite the tortuous attempt at getting at the proper interpretation of Jesus' parable, its meaning is evident. It is a picture of that selfish stubbornness, or stubborn selfishness, that always wants its own way. The Pharisees, scribes and their followers were fundamentally unwilling to act upon the ideas and leadership of another. They wanted to rule, not surrender the government of their lives. This is the basic explanation for their exterior fickleness and is the cause of it. They could

not be satisfied with what was offered, not because of the character of the game suggested, but because they were determined to make no response. When this is the case, people sit sullenly and obstinately unresponsive, regardless of what offer is made them. Barclay reminds us that

The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person and the same institution from quite opposite grounds and reasons.

The fault of the people's dissatisfaction lay, not in the fact that Jesus or John offered questionable alternatives, but in the fact that anything that varied from the preconceived notions of their detractors was suspect. Thus it was easy to question whether John be a real prophet of God, or whether Jesus be the Christ, since neither neatly fit into the common prejudices.

This simple illustration brilliantly demonstrates how shrewd a grasp Jesus had of His age. The smiling, applauding crowds did not deceive Him. Although He did not intentionally annoy them by refusing to go along with their wishes, He knew that these fickle crowds would ultimately oppose Him, because He would not merely please, entertain and feed them indefinitely.

This bright little picture of **children sitting in the village square** makes us ask how often had Jesus Himself played these children's games as a boy? This is probably not just a good illustration, but an experience lived by this keen Observer of children. Jesus had time to stop to watch children's play. Had He heard these same complaints uttered by His brothers and sisters?

B. A CONTRAST IN CARICATURES (11:18, 19)

Here Jesus exposes their fickleness by showing how they required of John what they condemned in Him and demanded of Him what they had condemned in John.

11:18 **For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon.** Luke (7:33) has "eating no bread and drinking no wine." Since these items were the common food of common people, these who object to John are complaining about his abstinence from things entirely normal and legitimate. **Eating no bread** but only what he could scrounge from the wilderness itself, **nor drinking** any normal beverage, just water. (See on Mt. 3:1, 4) But this ascetic way of life was John's sagacious adaptation of himself

to his particular mission to bring repentance to Israel. Before Jesus' revelation of the compatibility between deep-felt repentance and carrying on a normal life, perhaps the popular mind in Israel would not have been willing to accept John's stern message from a man who, himself, were a person living a normal life, eating common food. This very striking difference, to which Jesus had alluded earlier, had caught and held the nation's attention. And for a short while, John too had been the idol of the populace. In those days his hardy life, his simple, course garments and his desert fare had not at all hurt his public image; rather, it would have tended to enhance it. Later, however, though people had streamed to him in droves, they slunk away rather than repent. Their comment: "Too strait-laced for us!"

He has a demon. (cf. Jn. 7:20; 8:48, 49; 10:20 later said of Jesus) This violent slander is what is necessary to justify those who utter it to cover their rejection of God's counsel. It is not too likely that anyone really thought John to be actually possessed by a demon. This vilification probably only means to discredit John as a crank or a fanatic. One of the master strokes of Jesus' style is to state the accusation in its most blatant form. He does not even try to offer any defense against so infamous a charge. The lives of both John and Jesus were so above reproach that these low vilifications were doomed to topple of their own weight.

11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. The psychological impact of this application of Jesus' parable of the playing children lies in the fact that it ends with Jewish rejection of Jesus, for this is the real issue. Although their repudiation of John held a menace to their ultimate salvation, since they were likely to reject John's God-inspired testimony to Jesus, still the final judgment is decided, not on "What will you do with John the Baptist?", but "What will you do with Jesus?" Putting Himself last in the application, the Savior leaves this latter question in the mind of His audience, stabbing their conscience.

Eating and drinking could be taken two ways, depending upon the mentality of those who laid this objection to Jesus:

1. From the standpoint of the extremely ascetic themselves, or of those whose view of piety would have been affected by them, the fact that Jesus ate normal food ("bread and wine" of verse 18; cf. Lk. 7:33) would be offensive, since piety, in their view, must express itself in frequent fasts. (Cf. Mt. 9:9-17 and parallels)

2. From the point of view of those living a normal life themselves, i.e. eating normal food, going to feasts and associating with common people, this accusation labels the Lord as a constant party-goer, known by the company He keeps.

During the entire course of His earthly mission, Jesus is recorded as having gone to a number of banquets, parties, and private meals. (Cf. The Cana wedding, Jn. 2:1-11; Matthew's farewell, Mt. 9:10-13; Lk. 5:29; The Pharisee Simon's house, Lk. 7:36ff.; Another Pharisee, Lk. 11:37ff.; A Pharisee Ruler, Lk. 14:1-24; Zacchaeus, Lk. 19:1-10) Even if these are merely a few of His many social contacts, He is damned by the carping detractors for not being "holy" enough.

Ironically, there was just enough truth in the sneers of the crowds to make these insults plausible: the libel lay in the exaggeration each phrase represents:

1. **gluttonous man.** (*phágos*) As indicated above, Jesus ate normal food and appreciated a pleasant meal. Since His mission was aimed at not one area of human life, but addressed to all aspects, Jesus could not follow habits peculiar to only one area. Rather, His manner of life reflected an even balance in all things, including His food and drink.
2. **winebibber.** (*oinopóitēs*) Did Jesus drink wine? He says He did. This is no great surprise. The greater surprise, especially in THIS context, would be to learn that He did NOT drink! The conduct of Jesus is thrown into deliberate contrast with that of a man who, for religious reasons, deliberately abstained from this very thing. The very affirmation, that the Son of man has come eating (bread) and drinking (wine), is found in a context where His moderation is neatly placed half-way between both extremes,—with teetotal abstinence in John's case, and with excess in the slander that He was a wino among other things. (See special study: "Should Jesus Drink Wine?")

Should anyone object that any "wine" that Jesus might have drunk would have been a non-alcoholic drink made of water mixed with cooked grape syrup, then the objector must explain the accusation of Jesus' critics. While it is true that the most unreasonable charges can be levelled against a man who has no dealings at all with that on which the charges are supposedly based, yet there has to be some shred of truth (however badly distorted) that makes the

charge even credible. If the "wine" here referred to is merely a non-alcoholic beverage, then what is the point of calling Jesus "a soft-drink man"? After all, the *oinos* of Lk. 7:33, which Jesus says He drinks, and the *oinos* of *oinopōtēs* in Mt. 11:19, of which the slanderers say He takes too much, is the same *oinos*.

3. **friend of publicans and sinners.** The slanderers insinuated that "a man is known by the company he keeps." But what the opposition intended as detraction, Jesus transformed into one of His most glorious titles. Because Jesus is, in the highest and best sense, "the friend of publicans and sinners," He is able to help untold millions of us publicans and sinners! (See notes on Mt. 9:12, 13)

C. A CONFIDENT CONCLUSION (11:19b)

And wisdom is justified by her works. (Lk 7:35: "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.") Without seeking an allegory behind these words, whereby Wisdom is seen as a divine mother who produces children which, in turn, represent the faithful minority who have welcomed the Baptist and the Christ, or even these two themselves, it is much simpler to see Jesus as applying the pragmatic test to the ministries both of John and of Himself. He is saying, then, "The wisdom of any course of action is tested and approved, or justified, by the results it produces, the deeds issuing from it, its natural fruit or offspring." While there were critics enough who stood around ready to sneer at the different approaches used by John and Jesus, the Lord is willing to submit both to the judgment of ultimate results and final fruits. Thoughtful men over the centuries have recognized the real wisdom behind the differing, but inwardly harmonious, courses of action followed by Jesus and John, so harshly and, ultimately, foolishly, censured by their contemporaries. The very number of transformed lives, because John had been willing to be nothing but a "Voice crying in the wilderness," and because Jesus was "the friend of sinners," justifies beyond a shadow of a doubt the wisdom of their chosen course. But the natural result of this pragmatic success of the separate ministries of John and Jesus is the conclusion that they who rejected them are fools! Men of real wisdom justify the two great men of God. Feel the real tragedy of Jn. 1:11-13, as well as its triumph.

is justified. Lenski (*Matthew*, 444) feels that, because this verb is aorist (*edikaiōthē*), Jesus refers to actions performed in the

past, John's career now ended and Jesus' deeds now slandered. However, though the verb is aorist passive, it need not be taken merely as a past tense, since it can be interpreted as a gnomic aorist, stating a general truth: "Wisdom is (and always will be) vindicated by her deeds, works, outcome, results, etc." The same view is arrived at, following the approach of Plummer, (*Matthew*, 163): "It is *certain* to be justified . . . the event is regarded as so sure to happen that it is spoken of as past." The pragmatic success of John and Jesus is noted by Barclay, (*Matthew*, II, 11):

The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved men's hearts to God as they had not moved for centuries; the Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in Him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

While the pragmatic test is not a final one whereby men, limited as they are by time and space, may know the truth or falsity of philosophy, since they cannot know ALL the long-range effects of the theory, yet, given all other evidences for the validity of a theory, it is of no use whatever unless it also works! Jesus is not pinning the ultimate truthfulness of His entire message on its workability, since its authenticity is proved by His signs, or miracles. (See on 11:4, 5) But if "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," then the real significance of Jesus' ministry lies in His ability really to make men over. Should it be possible that His miracles identified His message as divine and yet that message fail to give men transforming power, of what use would the miracles be? Worse still, His message would be suspect, worse than useless. But the best part about the ministry of John who prepared the way, and that of Jesus, is that they did not merely flash their divine authority to speak, but actually produced the results that they were sent to accomplish. John actually brought men to repentance and to Jesus. Jesus actually brought men to forgiveness and the new birth, and made them fit for the presence of God.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. How did John in prison learn about the deeds of Jesus?
2. According to Matthew, about what, exactly, did John hear? the works of _____.
3. In what general context does Luke place this incident? What were some of the deeds of Jesus to which Luke thus alludes? Why, then,

does Matthew place this incident in some other context? Harmonize this apparent contradiction in fact.

4. State the exact point of John's question to Jesus. Affirm or deny the following proposition and tell why: "John in prison was weakening in faith in Jesus as the Messiah."
5. State the reasons why John may have propounded such a question to Jesus.
6. State and explain the answer that Jesus sent back to John. Show how Jesus' answer fulfills prophecies regarding the Christ, hence identifies Jesus as the Messiah to all who had eyes to see it.
7. State the evidence that Jesus gave John. Was this evidence different in kind from the evidence Jesus provided other people? What does your answer to this question indicate about the nature of the evidence that God gives to help all people believe Him?
8. What Old Testament prophet did Jesus cite in reference to John?
9. Give specific illustrations of Jesus' miracles to which He made reference in His answer to John. For example, name some of the dead raised to life prior to the arrival of John's question.
10. Explain the traits of character referred to in the figurative expressions: "a reed shaken with the wind", "a man clothed in soft raiment".
11. What is meant by the phrase: "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force"? Are there other possible translations of this expression, that would affect the interpretation? What are the problems of interpretation? Write the sentence in such a way as to show which way you interpret and apply what Jesus meant.
12. Explain how John the Baptist both *was* and *was not* the Elijah who was to come. (See Lk. 1:17; Jn. 1:21)
13. In Jesus' illustration of His generation, to what games of children does He make reference? What is the exact point of comparison in the illustration to which He draws attention?
14. Explain how "wisdom is justified by her works (or children)." To whose wisdom does Jesus refer: His own, John's, or that of the Jews of His day?
15. What two outstanding proclaimers of God's Kingdom suffered violence during their life and ministry and whose lives ended in violent death?
16. What did the Jews of Jesus' day do with the message of John and Jesus? Be careful, they did not all do the same thing.
17. Did Jesus "eat bread and drink wine", like any other Jew of His

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time? Some object to the idea that Jesus drank wine. What does this passage say regarding Jesus' personal practice, if anything? State what you know of Jewish customs of that period that might help answer this question.

SPECIAL STUDY: SHOULD JESUS DRINK WINE?

Without hesitation many Christians respond in the negative without examining the reasons for their conclusion. If pushed for a reason, they might reply, "The Bible forbids its use." To this a skeptic might raise the challenge: "Always? Unconditionally?" At this point the teetotaler might object, "But Jesus is my example, and I KNOW that He would not drink. For me, His example is conclusive."

But is the presupposition on which this conclusion is drawn a correct one? That is, is it true that "Jesus would not drink"? Instead of supposing what a person might or might not have done, is it not better to ask the person himself, to learn what his practice really was? Why not ask Jesus, "Lord, what is your personal practice regarding wine? How does your practice compare with that of your contemporaries, or how does it differ?"

To this, Jesus made reply: "John the Baptist came eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has an evil spirit.' The Son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look! A greedy fellow and a drinker, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners.' Yet wisdom is proved right by all her children." (Luke 7:33-35)

The life-style of Jesus revealed in this text is probably quite different from that expected of Him by ascetics of every age. Yet what this text actually says proves that their desire to use the Son of man as a champion for the cause of total abstinence on the question of alcohol is based on other considerations and not on the example of Jesus. Note the importance of this text as it relates to this question:

1. *Jesus affirmed that He normally and habitually drank wine.*

This is not a conclusion drawn by scholars or the consensus of critics, but the unabashed statement of the Lord Himself as He comments on His own way of life. The question at issue in this context is the immediate contrast between the fundamental wisdom behind the way of life practiced by John the Baptist and Jesus, and the fundamental folly of

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those who perversely refused to accept the life, message, ministry and mission of either. However, it is worthy of note that Jesus did not change His life-style merely because it laid Him open to the criticism of being a "glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

2. Jesus affirmed that He habitually drank wine *and said so in a context where His meaning is clear, His practice being sharply contrasted with that of the abstainers on the one hand, and that of the drunkards on the other.*
 - a. Jesus was not an abstainer, as evidenced by the contrast with the life-long habits of John the Baptist whose well-known asceticism was common knowledge and the basis for the baseless criticism of him by fickle people.
 - b. Jesus was no drunkard or glutton, since He Himself borrows these slanders from the mouth of His detractors, not from those who objectively try to describe His real manner of life. His matchless life and sinless character unmask these vilifications for what they are.
 - c. Therefore, Jesus' practice, by His own statement, clarified by His stated antitheses, stands exactly halfway between both extremes. His is neither the teetotaler's abstinence nor the drunkard's excess, but the moderate's evenness of balance in all things.
3. Jesus affirmed that He habitually drank wine, *saying so to a people accustomed to think of wine as a blessing.*
 - a. That the Jews knew wine and other strong drink to be a dangerous curse, goes without saying, as many texts testify. (Cf. Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:10, 21; 23:29-35, etc.)
 - b. But the Jews knew wine to be the generous blessing from the Lord. (Gen. 27:28; Psa. 104:15; Isa. 55:1; Hos. 2:8, 9, 22; Joel 2:19-24; Amos 9:13, 14)
 - (1) They spoke of bread and wine as the staple articles of diet. (Gen. 27:25, 37; Dt. 11:14; Num. 6:20; Judg. 19:19-21; 2 Sam. 16:1, 2; 2 Chron. 11:11, etc.)
 - (2) Consequently, they were required to put wine on the grocery list of provisions for the priesthood (Num. 18:12; Dt. 18:4; 1 Chron. 9:29, etc.)
 - (3) Wine appeared as a normal expression of ordinary hospitality. (Gen. 14:18; Judg. 19:19-21; 1 Sam. 16:20; 25:18; 1 Chron. 12:40; Jn. 2:3-10)

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- (4) Wine was commanded as a drink offering to God (Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:5, 7, 10), probably because it was in common use and therefore had practical value to the Jews. This made it a proper thing that could be offered in sacrifice to God.
 - (5) Wine was consumed by the Israelites even at their religious festivals. (Dt. 14:22-26; 12:17, 18; Isa. 62:8, 9)
 - (6) The Jews knew of its value as an anesthetic (Prov. 31:6, 7; Lk. 10:34) as well as its necessity in case of bad water or stomach infermities (1 Tim 5:23)
- c. So, for Jesus to confess to eating bread and drinking wine to a Jewish audience, is no more than to confess to living a quite normal life. As an accurate reading of the circumstances in this text (Luke 7:33-35 and Mt. 11:18, 19) will show, it was this very normalness about Jesus' conduct that drew fire from the cynics. In collision with the popular view as to what a "holy man" should be, Jesus wore no hair shirt, fasted so secretly that no one ever knew about it (if He ever did), ate common food, drank common drink and made no extraordinary effort to let His real holiness appear in a superficial manner. But His real character was so well attested, that He did not need to dignify the accusation of being a "winebibber and a glutton" by even bothering to answer it. The facts people knew about His life spoke for themselves.

So, the real question is not "Should Jesus drink wine?" as our tongue-in-cheek title would have it, for, as a matter of fact, He did. But this is not the point to be discussed with the modern Christian, disturbed by the excess in certain areas surrounding the use of wine or other forms of alcohol. The question is really "Should a Christian follow his Lord's example in drinking wine today?"

Although the apostolic doctrine is replete with stern denunciations of "drunkenness wherein is riot and excess," yet the Apostles do not enjoin unconditional and perpetual abstinence as the way around over-indulgence. Theirs too is the route of habitual moderation in all things (1 Co. 9:25), since they are suspicious of any doctrine that promotes rigor of devotion, self-abasement and severity to the body through negative regulations that God did not give. Such

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prohibitions might have an appearance of wisdom, but are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:16-23)

Beyond his disparaging of drunkenness and other forms of excess connected with the attitudes and activities under the influence of alcohol, the Apostle Paul, for instance, can find no rational basis for abstaining either from meat or wine in normal practice, since he knows that all God's gifts (the context is food) are to be received with thanksgiving. (1 Tim. 4:1-5) However, under special circumstances Paul could conceivably dispense with ANY given food, for instance, if it caused a brother to stumble. (Ro. 14:21) But contextually, it is obvious that the Apostle viewed this abstinence only as necessary in reference to the weaker Christian who had some scruple against that particular food. (See Ro. 14:1—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12-20; 8 all; 10:23-33) This is a necessary conclusion, since Paul could delineate no objective or absolute principle whereby wine or any food should be proscribed under any and all circumstances.

Further, in seeking qualified personnel for the highest tasks in the Church, the Apostle demanded that no excessive drinkers be tolerated in the eldership or in the diaconate. (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Tit. 1:7) In giving directions for producing Christlike piety in the Church, he only urges Titus (2:3) to bid older women not to be slaves to drink. However, in neither case does he suggest abstinence as a necessary quality. Rather, when he felt called upon to give his advice to a young abstainer, Paul counselled Timothy specifically in favor of wine, as opposed to water. (1 Tim. 5:23)

"Should Jesus Drink Wine?" may be an amusing question, but it will stand for serious reflection. Jesus was a Jew living in first-century Palestine. Out of proper moral consideration for the needs and views of His people, He ate and drank the food common to His people. It is a fair question whether He would follow His first-century practice while living, say, among twentieth-century Americans, whose history and attitudes toward alcohol may well be quite different than that of first-century Jews. But here it may be objected that twentieth-century Americans may need instruction by the Son of God, so that their (mistaken?) conscience be edified, i.e. formed along entirely different lines.

"WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS"?

Lest some, caught up in the confusing currents of a relativistic

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age and maddened by the spineless morality of situation ethics, mistake this position taken here to be the same drivel, let it be vigorously denied that situation ethics has anything to do with Christianity.

The assertions made earlier that Jesus did in fact drink wine in His own situation in the first century, primarily because He chose to conform His practice with that of His own people, the Jews, cannot be construed in any fashion to justify the character-rotting influence of that immorality passing under the current name of "situation ethics." "Situation ethics," as I understand the phrase in its popular use, refers to a life guided by NO ABSOLUTE moral principle. There is no absolute morality, that is, except for the pervasive rule of thumb that each situation must be dealt with as a separate entity without any necessary reference to any other situation. According to its various practitioners, each moral decision must be made without reference to the (im)moral standard of reference of the individuals involved, be it hedonism, opportunism or whatever.

There is a chasmic contrast between this view of ethical decisions and that practiced by Jesus of Nazareth and expected of His disciples. Whereas "situation ethics" has no fixed code of absolutes within the sphere of which ethical judgments are made, Christ's doctrine proclaims a rigid standard of inflexible righteousness. This standard outlines clearly what is meant by drunkenness, fornication, theft, lying, etc. By forbidding these and commanding their ethical opposites, i.e. temperance, purity, integrity, etc., Jesus unveiled a code of absolutes as demanding as the very character of God Himself! (See "Jesus' Purpose For Preaching This Sermon", notes on the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, 188ff.) What is NOT spelled out in regard to these standards is how they are to be applied in every case. To a certain degree every situation faced by Jesus' disciple will be different from every other. So, instead of writing new rules of conduct for each new situation, Jesus placed into the hands of His disciple a few simple directives by which he may decide how to act ethically in each situation. (There directives may be gleaned from great blocks of Scripture on this subject, such as Ro. 14:1—15:7; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; chap. 8; 10:23-33; 16:14; 1 Jn. 3, etc.)

Thus it is that the Christ and His disciples are armed, not with some self-seeking, self-serving philosophy, but girded with the revelations of the living God in an enlightened conscience, face each situation and decide what each must do (1) to please the Father, and (2) to serve his fellow man best in that situation, and (3) what will achieve his own highest goal.

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Now to return: should Jesus (or His disciple) drink wine? But to ask this question is to see another: what other moral considerations were weighed into His decision which brought Him to act as He did in that given situation? If we fail to see these, we should badly interpret why He pursued that course, and, as a natural consequence, we would misapply His example in our own period.

He drank wine in an age that knew no automobiles racing along a narrow ribbon of concrete within a cubit of oncoming traffic. He drank wine in a society not yet pressed for time, where the need for ready reflexes to operate fast-moving machinery was small. He lived in an age that moved in terms of the sun, not the timeclock. His was an era of walkers, not riders, to whom sedentary living was less a problem. But He also lived in an age as profligate as any other, an age that sought its amusements in the arms of Bacchus, an age when many a party devolved into revelry. Even so, Jesus could trace a clear line of godly conduct between asceticism and excess. In our own highly industrialized machine age, common sense considerations of safety may cause the Lord to counsel against alcohol in any situation where consideration for others and one's own safety is compromised by slower reflexes.

In light of Jesus' practice, another interesting, if unsolvable, puzzle is the question why the Lord did not concern Himself greatly with the long-term effect of alcohol on the brain about which modern research has so much to say. Is it possible that Jesus' answer to this query might be: "Do not drink to excess, and you need not fear the adverse effects of alcohol on your brain"? After all, is not His practice somewhat indicative of the conclusion that a moderate use of alcohol by a God-oriented man need not fear long-range negative effects on any part of his body, presuming that this man eats, sleeps and exercises normally? Or to state the problem differently, would not Jesus, Revealer of God and Creator of man, surely have revealed something of the lethal danger of drinking what is held to be a poison? Is it too much to argue that His silence on the subject and His personal practice, taken together, argue that our body chemistry can absorb and profitably use a certain amount of alcohol?

IS ALCOHOLISM A SICKNESS?

Another ramification of the conclusion that Jesus Himself drank wine, though never to excess (a conclusion drawn from His unanswerable denunciation of drunkenness as sin and from His own unimpeach-

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able character, Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15), is the dilemma: should we consider the alcoholic a sinner or a sick man? To put the question in other terms: did Jesus escape alcoholism by righteousness (moderation), by maintaining a healthy body, or both?

While modern research has tended to demonstrate the direct connection between long-term embibing and many mental and physical debilities, sicknesses to which both psychological and medical cures must be applied, what is the meaning of the statement: "The alcoholic is a sick man"? This declaration, while declaring an objective reality, is often made with emotional overtones that suggest that the alcoholic can no more be charged with the responsibility for his condition than would a child suffering from measles. On the other hand, some religionists talk as if the alcoholic could be transformed into a proper citizen simply by immediate and permanent swearing off of alcohol, without any recourse to medical or psychological help to repair the damage that has been done to his body, mind, life, as if correcting the alcoholic's responsibility for his weakened condition were the whole of his rehabilitation.

Before we hasten to decide whether the alcoholic is *either* a sick *or* a sinful man, let us remember that some dilemmas are badly stated, including this one. There is a third alternative: the alcoholic may be *both* a sick *and* a sinful man. His sin has made him a sick man. Forgiveness of his sin will not make him a well man. Making him a well man in body and mind, insofar as modern science is able to effect this, will not make him acceptable to God. He must be both saved and healed. His rehabilitation in both these respects may require much time and may witness many set-backs, but it must take place in both areas, i.e. healing of the body and purifying the conscience and reinforcing the will, if the whole man is to be brought back to normalcy.

There is one sad, tragic fact that may face the alcoholic which, repent as he might, he cannot change: damage to his body as the natural consequence of alcohol's ruinous effects. A man may repent a thousand times of his carelessness in handling a powersaw, but his tears and his undoubted change for the good cannot give him back his right arm sawn away in the accident. If this analogy applies to the alcoholic in any way, it becomes a stern warning to any who drink, that alcohol is capable of bringing upon him a blight that no amount of repentance can correct.

Numerous are the instances where Jesus performed this very healing of both body and soul by curing the body and forgiving the

CHAPTER ELEVEN

sin. He not only purified the conscience but also provided the Gospel whereby the whole man can be transformed into a strong, stable character. What is most remarkable is that Jesus held all sinners responsible for the mess into which they get themselves (Cf. Jn. 5:14; Mt. 12:45), especially drunkards (Lk. 21:34; Ro. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). Accordingly, if people were merely sick due to some physical weakness related to causes not dependent upon their choice, then, presumably, Jesus could not justly hold them responsible for the bad results of their actions. So, the fact that He judges men responsible for their drunkenness, lays the charge for failure, not merely upon constitutional weaknesses, but upon the quality of the heart of the individual. Rather than become a scientist or a doctor to heal all mankind by giving out useful remedies or advice on physical health, He dealt with man's fundamental problem: his relation with God and man. If THIS problem be not solved, physical or mental healing if only to live a few more years in constant danger of being corrupted again, solves nothing.

HOW DID JESUS ESCAPE BECOMING AN ALCOHOLIC?

As completely out of place as this query may seem, yet to answer it may lead us to grasp something of the answer to our other question, "Should Jesus' disciple drink wine?" How is it possible to harmonize the potentially catastrophic danger that alcohol represents both to the individual and to society, with Jesus' practice of taking wine? The secret lies in being guided by all the moral directives that prompted Jesus. By taking His view of the world, by having a conscience molded by the will of God and by showing the same forthright obedience to the Father as did He, by knowing no other dependence than upon the daily provision of the Father, one will be pleased to learn that he is not troubled by those diseases that excess and indulgence bring in their wake.

Section 25

JESUS CONDEMNS UNBELIEVING CITIES AND INVITES "BABES" TO COME TO HIM

I. HEARTBROKEN CONDEMNATION

20. Then began he to unbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.
21. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
22. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.
23. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down into Hades; for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day.
24. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

II. HEAVEN'S AUTHORITY

25. At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes:
26. yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.
27. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *him*.

II. HEARTFELT COMPASSION

28. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29. 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.
30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How did God "reveal things" to babes and "hide" them from the wise? If God hides truth from anybody, is that not partiality? Prove your answer.
- b. How is Jesus' yoke easy?

- c. What kind of labor and burdens do you think Jesus was promising to relieve?
- d. Why and how will it be more tolerable in the judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum?
- e. What do you think Jesus expected of the people in Capernaum to do, that they did not do, which, in turn, moved Him to upbraid them for not repenting?
- f. What is repentance?
- g. Have you ever wished that you could have been personally present with Jesus during His ministry in those happy, golden days in Capernaum along the shores of blue Galilee? What grand illusions does this particular section shatter, bringing such dreaming back to reality and prepares us for eternity and judgment?
- h. Do you think that this section teaches us to believe that there will be degrees of punishment for the wicked? On what basis do you answer as you do? If you say yes, then does that not picture God as showing favoritism in judgment, using one standard for Tyre and Sidon and Sodom while requiring another of the privileged cities of Galilee? If you say no, then how do you interpret the words "more tolerable"?
- i. Should we revise our theology and our hymns that teach us, "Jesus never fails". It appears that Jesus has clearly failed to win these famous Galilean cities for God's Kingdom, even though most of His time and work had been spent within their precincts. How do you explain this failure?
- j. Is Jesus meaning to say that not a single soul in these three cities had repented? Give proof for the answer you give.
- k. In what way can a city or a people be "exalted to heaven"? In what way can they be "brought down to Hades"? Where is "Hades"?
- l. Jesus thanks God for hiding important truth from the "wise and understanding". It would seem to some that this is putting a premium on ignorance and degrading the advancement in knowledge and culture. This is a long-held charge laid against Christianity. How would you interpret these words of Jesus in such a way as would show that, in reality, Jesus actually holds no brief for ignorance and unwillingness to seek truth?
- m. Even though a man may be very well-developed intellectually, when he views God's way of saving the world as nonsense, what then should we say about him and his wisdom? Should we reject all the truth that he knows, even though he rejects the gospel we

know? Is he a fool for rejecting the gospel? If so, how far has he lost the key to truth, i.e. can he continue learning truth about nature? Will he be hampered in learning the fundamental truth about himself and human nature? How far will he err or fail to grasp the fundamental truths of psychology or sociology?

- n. Do you think that Jesus accepts the possibility that the people He describes as "wise and understanding" really are wise and understanding? What makes you say that?
- o. What is there so praiseworthy about people whom Jesus describes as "babes"?
- p. Should we get excited or be upset by the attacks upon Christianity launched by the intelligentsia of our day? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
- q. What fundamental attitude is Jesus requiring before participation in His Kingdom is even possible?
- r. Why should Jesus be thankful to God that some folks are actually unable to see the truth ("I thank you that you have hidden these things from the wise.")? How can any sane person be thankful for this?
- s. If Jesus be *only a mere man*, what must we conclude about the grandiloquent claims He is making for Himself in this section? If Jesus be God come in the flesh, what must we do about the claims He makes upon us in this section?
- t. After reading the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' other sermons on the high cost of discipleship (for example, Luke 14:26-33), can we still take Him seriously, when He claims that His yoke is the easy one, HIS burden the light one? If so, how?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus began then to censure those cities where He had done most of His miracles, simply because they remained apathetic and unrepentant. "How sorry I am for you, Chorazin! You too are to be pitied, Bethsaida! For if the wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon, had seen the miracles performed to demonstrate God's authority that you have seen, their people would have turned to God long ago, wearing the sackcloth of shame and with ashes on their head to show their humility. But let me tell you that it is going to go easier on judgment day for those wicked cities than for you!

"And you, Capernaum, do you suppose that I will exalt you to a position of imminence, power and importance, simply because I have preached in your midst? No! As a city you shall die! Had the

miracles taken place in the vilest city you can think of—even Sodom, that I have performed in your streets, yes, even Sodom would still be standing today! But I can assure you that it will go much easier for the whole land of Sodom than for you!”

At that time Jesus prayed, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who suppose themselves to be learned and wise, and for showing it to humble, teachable people. Yes, Father, I thank you that you were pleased to do it that way.

“My Father has turned everything over to me. No one really knows me, except the Father, and no one really knows God but me! And I am willing to reveal God to anyone I want to. So, come to me, all you who are worn-out and loaded down with impossible burdens. I will give you real rest. Here: wear my yoke: let me teach you. You will find me gentle with you and genuinely humble. You will actually find the soul refreshment you are seeking. Last but not best, in the final analysis, you will find that, of all the yokes you will ever know, my yoke is the easy one; my burden is really the light one.”

SUMMARY

Jesus denounced those privileged cities where He had spent the major part of His earthly ministry, because they remained undecided and unwilling to turn to God after all His efforts and evidences given to convince them. Wicked cities with less opportunity will not be so severely condemned as those reasonably good cities that had refused to take a positive stand for Jesus. Then, in rapid-fire order, Jesus expresses the rigorous judgment of the Judge Himself, His exultation over the Father’s choice of method. Next He makes the highest possible claim to the knowledge of God by excluding all others. Upon the basis of this claim, He makes the deepest, most sympathetic invitation to the whole human race, while asserting the most incredible humility. He concludes by making the astounding claim that, after all, His way is best.

NOTES

11:20 **Then began he.** Luke (10:13-16) records this same denunciation pronounced upon the three Galilean cities, however with several noteworthy differences, in connection with the mission of the Seventy. Because of this fact, the chronological unity of Matthew’s

chapter has been doubted. That is, is this condemnation of these cities situated in its proper chronological place? While it is true that Matthew often links together in the same chapter harmoniously organized material from different situations, weaving them into one closely-woven whole, the following suggestions tend to argue that in this case he did not do so:

1. Matthew's version of the denunciation is given in some loose connection with Jesus' Galilean ministry, while Luke makes it clear that the Mission of the Seventy, and the instructions given in connection with it, were given after Jesus had definitely left Galilee for Jerusalem. (Cf. Lk. 9:51, 52; 10:1 "after this")
2. In the commission of the Seventy, the significant omission of the injunction not to enter either Gentile or Samaritan territory (cf. Mt. 10:5, 6) may point to the evangelization of an area containing mixed populations, such as Perea with its Decapolis, without excluding Judea. If this is, in fact, the case, then a different audience for Jesus' remarks, especially this denunciation in Lk. 10:13-15, would naturally permit Jesus to repeat what He had said earlier (Mt. 11:20-24)
3. The fact that Jesus' actual commission of the Seventy includes Luke 10:16, shows that Luke intended to include the denunciation as an integral part of that commission. This is all the more significant in light of the fact that Lk. 10:16 was also said to the Twelve before their mission in Galilee (Mt. 10:40), a fact that tends to confirm the conclusion that Matthew and Luke record similar words spoken on two separate occasions.
4. That they are similar, but not identical expressions, will be seen from the following arrangements:

Matthew:

- a. Chorazin and Bethsaida; Tyre and Sidon; facts and fate compared.
- b. Capernaum and Sodom; facts and fate compared.

Luke:

- a. Sodom and any city rejecting the Apostles; fate not connected in any way with Capernaum.
- b. Chorazin and Bethsaida; Tyre and Sidon; facts and fate compared.
- c. Capernaum's fate, not compared with that of Sodom.

Therefore, this condemnation of the unrepentant cities is in its chronological places both here in the Sermon of Matthew 11 as well as in the commission of the Seventy in Luke 10. In that place it is in order for two important reasons:

1. Since His great Galilean ministry would already have been concluded, His words become a warning to any other cities in the virgin territory to which He would send the Seventy, that to reject Jesus or any of His messengers is to invite the same dreadful judgment pending for the Galilean cities that had remained impenitent.
2. Precisely because Jesus would not be permitted the leisure to develop the same friendly rapport with other cities in Palestine, as He had with Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, the people of other cities might be tempted to feel themselves particularly neglected and, hence, at a great disadvantage because they would not be able to witness so many miracles at first hand. So, by uttering, both in Galilee and elsewhere, this fiery judgment upon those privileged towns, Jesus serves notice both to the privileged and underprivileged cities alike that no amount of first-hand acquaintance with Him can take the place of genuine repentance! The miracles, and the proof of them, are important, but not at the expense of the real point of Christ's mission: God was in Christ endeavoring to bring men to their knees in surrender of their lives.

But even having said that this condemnation was uttered in Galilee within earshot of some of the inhabitants of the very cities in question, does not also argue that this chapter is one continuous sermon, since **then began he** may be taken, not as a note of time ("the very next thing Jesus said was . . ."), but could well be Matthew's means of transition from one subject to another. ("Then another thing Jesus said in this same general connection was . . .")

I. INVINCIBLE UNBELIEF (11:20-24)

A. IMPENITANCE = UNBELIEF (11:20)

Then began he to upbraid (*oneidizein*, "to reproach justifiably," Arndt-Gingrich, 573). **Upbraid** means to rebuke, censure, blame; to charge, accuse or reprove reproachfully. But why would the usually quiet, gentle Jesus be so disturbed? We must feel the ironic contrast in Matthew's introduction: God's part in seeking to save these cities had been **mighty works** done by Jesus. Men's reaction: **they repented not!** Whose conscience would not be

deeply indignant at this obstinate refusal of divine mercy! In Jonah's ministry to Ninevah, the warning of imminent total disaster and the terrifying judgment of God was sufficient to bring vicious pagans like those Assyrians to tremble on their knees before God. By contrast, even the "riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience," by which Jesus' message of mercy and ministry of generous helpfulness were intended to encourage men to change their lives, could not move God's own people! Jesus scolds them, because He knows that a refusal to repent constitutes defiance of the living God! (Cf. Ro. 2:3-6) They were so very unforgivable, for they rejected evidence that would have persuaded some of the wickedest cities in the world! Whereas this same gentle Jesus had spoken many precious promises and would yet offer many yearning invitations to these people, they must now hear the other side of the question: the fiery condemnation and the fearful warnings. They must face what Lenski calls "the mighty and terrible Jesus."

Surprisingly, as Jesus sounds these awesome warnings, we realize that we are standing in the presence of the very Messiah that John the Baptist had been seeking! This entire section (11:20-30) is Jesus' own claim to be the Judge Himself who would one day take up the winnowing shovel to separate the wheat from the chaff. The day would come when He would actually sieze the ax to cut down fruitless trees. And the first among the worthless to go down would be these very cities who had had the finest opportunities to know the truth of God and live by it! In this one stroke, Jesus justifies the OT predictions of the Messiah's justice, clarifies what John longed to see Jesus undertake now and gives us all fair warning, by asserting that He would bring this all to pass. But by His great invitation, He teaches us that the day of mercy and of God's long-suffering is still in effect.

Cities wherein most of his mighty works were done.

A phrase like this proves to us once more how very little we know of all that Jesus did. (Cf. Jn. 21:25) Even after a close examination of the recorded incidents in that tri-city area, we must admit that great selectivity has been exercised in eliminating all but the few stories we do have. And though the Evangelists' impression is that these narratives are representative of the rest, yet our knowledge of the samples does not permit us to presume we know all there is to know even about the earthly ministry of our Lord.

Most of his mighty works (*hai pleístai dunámeis autoú*). Though *pleístos* is superlative in form, yet in *koiné* Greek, as in

modern popular English, the superlative is used with a much more relative sense than the form suggests. It is used for emotional emphasis (relative use) where we would translate it "very," or "many." (See Robertson-Davis, *Short Grammar*, 206; Arndt-Gingrich, 696; Dana-Mantey, 121) To get a quantitatively precise picture of the miracles wrought there and, at the same time, be faithful to *koiné* usage, we should translate it "many of His works." The word "most" however, carries its proper emotional impact and, simultaneously, vouches for the authenticity of Matthew's work. If he were inventing his story and altering to avoid possible mistakes, he would be unlikely to admit that most of the great miracles of his Messiah resulted in the failure to win those who witnessed them. Yet, if he did consciously say that the major part of Jesus' miracles produced no more than this, then we may rest assured that he is not counterfeiting, and his story true. We must search elsewhere for the explanation behind this admission (that Jesus' works failed to secure repentance in significant cases).

Jesus' ministry there was two-pronged, consisting of action and preaching. (Cf. Ac. 1:1: His "doing" came before his "teaching.") Jesus first established His right to say what He came to reveal, then He preached it.

1. Incidents in the tri-city area:

- a. Jesus moved there with His family and disciples. (Jn. 2:12)
- b. At Cana in the first year of His ministry, He healed the nobleman's son who was dying at Capernaum. (Jn. 4:46-54)
- c. Miraculous catch of fish, called four fishermen, healed many (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5).
- d. In Capernaum the man with the unclean demon liberated on the sabbath in the synagogue (Mk. 1; Lk. 4).
- e. Peter's mother-in-law healed that afternoon (Mt. 8; Mk. 1; Lk. 4).
- f. That evening, whole city gathered at door for healing.
- g. Paralytic borne by four men was cured (Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 4).
- h. Centurion's servant healed (Mt. 8; Lk. 7).
- i. Stilling the tempest, with other little boats from cities also present on the lake with Jesus (Mt. 8; Mk. 4:36; Lk. 8).
- j. Jairus' daughter raised from dead (Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8).

k. Woman with hemorrhage cured (Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8). But mere mighty works alone cannot produce faith, if they are divorced from what the miracle Worker says of Himself. Jesus' miracles could be verified by these very townspeople, but they failed to see that these signs pointed to Jesus' identity. These **mighty works** were in themselves a word from God, saying, "This is my Son: listen to Him!"

2. Some of Jesus' greatest messages were delivered in this area:
 - a. Perhaps the Sermon on the Mount was preached close enough to these cities that at least some of the inhabitants could have heard it.
 - b. The Sermon on the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:59).
 - c. Probably also the Message on Human Traditions (Mt. 15; Mk. 7).
 - d. The Sermon on True Greatness, Stumbling-blocks, Mis-treatment and Forgiveness (Mt. 18).

What is the connection between Jesus' miracles and the result He anticipated, i.e. the repentance of these Galileans? His miracles served to lead men to change their lives, by demonstrating Jesus' right to demand that they repent. Since His miracles were evidence of the nearness of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:28), the paradox was true: though the Kingdom of God had come nigh to them, yet they remained far from the Kingdom! (Cf. Lk. 10:9-12 with Mk. 12:34) Their continued impenitence, even in the presence of the best evidence of a divine break-through into human history, is the best answer for those who would insist upon the supreme necessity of miraculous manifestations today for convincing the impenitent skeptics. We must not depend upon **mighty works** to convince and convert men today, if the Gospel attested by Christ's own miracles was rejected by men of the same mentality in His day. To paraphrase Abraham's response to the tormented rich man: "No, if they hear not Christ and the Apostles, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead or work other marvelous miracles."

They repented not is a tragic epitaph! What could have been the motives that induced these privileged Galileans to justify their failure to repent? Some of the fatal assumptions may have been:

1. "Proximity to the Lord is as acceptable as faith." Physical nearness to Him did not guarantee their repentance nor strengthen their faith. The more distant ministry of John the Baptist had stirred multitudes throughout the nation, but not even Jesus' ministry right in their midst had been able to bring these cities to their knees. In fact, the sheer common-

ness of their fellowship with Him may have dulled their sensitivity to His message and to His mission on their behalf. It is foolish to think that faith would necessarily have been excited in us, or would be stronger than it is, had we been immediate neighbors of the Master and thus witnesses of His life and work. (Analogous cases: Jn. 11:47; 12:37) Here is the moral exception to the proverb: "Seeing is believing." This area had seen many wonders but did not believe the moral significance of them sufficiently to submit to the message based on them.

2. "Morality may be substituted for repentance." The relative morality of these cities seems to have been higher than that of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. They may have even been priding themselves on their relative respectability. Perhaps they even sneered at Jesus' demands that they bow with other common sinners, that they too be born again, repent deeply and sincerely seek the redemption and leadership He offered. They were generally good people; they at least did not try to stone or crucify Jesus. In fact, one could say that they accepted Jesus up to a point. But, for Jesus, that "certain point" cannot exist: He wants all or nothing. He teaches that the greatest sin man can commit is to refuse to believe in Him. And, as far as the so-called "good morality" is concerned, it is not really good after all. A person or a city that retains itself for itself and does not give itself to the Lord, is really wicked! They were too confident that they already pursued the proper course, with God. Their "good conscience" was their most blinding fault. Jesus was not trying to make people more or less good; He was endeavoring to lead them to trust Him to make them perfect! We too may shudder at the sins of others and at the punishment they have incurred, and yet be far more guilty ourselves of crime against God. We may not be violent, sensual people, ready to ridicule or oppose the work of Christ. And yet our own self-righteousness and complacency will cause us to be indifferent to Him, dulling the influence of His ministry, letting Him produce no change in us. Though externally our lives may be more eminently respectable than those whose conduct is openly disreputable, we may be ungodly in a far more deadly way.
3. "Education in godliness, or information, is as good as faith." These cities had enjoyed the distinct opportunity to be edu-

cated directly at the feet of the Master Himself, whom to know was to know the very mind of God! But the mere fact that they had heard many messages and were informed on the nature of God's plans did not release these Galileans from the necessity of trusting Jesus! For, according to the measure of light against which they sinned, so will their judgment be! They enjoyed the utmost opportunity. Now they must face the utmost in responsibility. They forgot the responsibilities of privilege.

4. They may even have supposed that sympathy with the Master's work were equal to repentance. Surely had they lacked some faith in His miraculous power or had they begrudged Him some understanding of His intentions, He would "have done no mighty works there." (Cf. Mt. 13:58; Mk. 5:6) But mere sympathy with His general program to the extent of rejoicing in the evidences of the blossoming of righteousness, or to the extent of agreeing that Jesus was on the right track in bringing God close to men, without submitting to the spiritual demands of His message, is to remain uncommitted, and, in Jesus' sight, ultimately against God. (Cf. 12:30) The sympathy that men show for Jesus' work and their agreement that His Gospel is the best view of life may help us to open their hearts to submit to His rule, but sympathy is not repentance.
5. "Failure to repent is as good as repentance." Christ was relegated to the realm of indifferent. They did not care enough about Him to react. Theirs was the sin of inaction. Many a man's defense before God is no more than this: "But I did not do anything!" But this may be his condemnation, for Jesus had outlined a plan of action. He blamed these favored cities **because they repented not.**

One cannot help wondering whether Jesus' piercing description of that last great Day were not most directly true of these cities: "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart for me, all you workers of iniquity!'" (Lk. 13:26, 27)

Because they repented not. To bring these cities to repentance was the Lord's grand desire and the practical goal of His labor. Even though He had lavished blessings upon them and caused much rejoicing, His toil appeared comparatively wasted, because He

could be satisfied with nothing short of repentance. He did not aim to leave His audiences merely richer, only better educated, perhaps more adequately adjusted socially, materially more comfortable. We must notice how little emphasis Jesus put upon the externals of religion. Even though great multitudes from these cities followed Him, they did not surrender their will to that of God. What great emphasis we tend to put on church buildings, budgets, numbers in attendance at worship, in short, mere trappings of religion, even though the people themselves, who are brought into contact with "our religion," do not feel the heavy burden of their responsibility for what they have had the opportunity to know of God! They must never be the same after hearing the voice of God speaking through Jesus! Do men actually hear this voice in our gospel proclamation? So, in our work for Him, we too must not rest content with results that did not please the Lord when He worked at the same task.

Implicit in His reproaches is the rigorous judgment pronounced by the Judge Himself:

1. By implication He claims to know the past more perfectly than any, by declaring what men of ancient cities WOULD HAVE DONE with better opportunities. Only omniscience could guarantee accuracy at this point.
2. By implication He claims to know with unshakeable certainty the outcome of the yet future judgment, an issue which only God could know.

And because these presuppositions are merely implied, not asserted or defended (as He does, in fact, do elsewhere, Jn. 5:22, 27; cf. Ac. 10:42; 17:31), the positive boldness with which Jesus speaks is the more awesome.

B. OPPORTUNITY = RESPONSIBILITY (11:21-24)

11:21 **Woe unto thee** (*ouai soi*) is an interjection denoting pain or displeasure (Arndt-Gingrich, 595), but in what sense does Jesus mean it here?

1. An as expression of grief, as if the Master is pained to reveal the fate of so many friends? This makes excellent sense here, because of Jesus' sorrowing sympathy for these who stumble on in their wilful blindness with no real conception of their impending doom. This idea is perfectly in harmony with the known character of our Lord, who is merciful even to the hardest sinners whose wilful unbelief demands additional signs when so many had already been given. (Cf. 12:38-42) **Woe** may be so interpreted. (Cf. Mt. 24:19; 26:24; Rev.

8:13; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19) Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 13) is certainly in order to notice:

This is not the accent of one who is in a temper because his self-esteem has been touched (nor) of one who is blazingly angry because . . . insulted, (nor) a passion of hatred at men. It is the accent of sorrow, . . . of one who offered men the most precious thing in the world and who saw it completely disregarded. (He is) watching a tragedy being played out and . . . is powerless to stop men rushing on to ruin.

2. In condemning judgment? Jesus hates sin, He cannot but expose it, even if it means scorching rebuke aimed at friends among whom He was a well-known and appreciated companion, for they had proudly refused God's grace. This suggestion is probably the right one, since, contextually, Jesus is clearly pronouncing the destiny of those who continued to reject His representation of God's mercy.

Chorazin is an otherwise unknown city probably located about two miles to the north of Capernaum, now utterly desolate, its very existence being yet attested by extensive ruins. (*ISBE*, 614a)

Bethsaida. Two cities bore this name and were both situated at the north end of the Sea of Galilee on opposite sides of the mouth of the Jordan River. A critical study of the following texts reveals them to be "Bethsaida in Galilee" (Jn. 12:21; Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17; near Capernaum) and "Bethsaida Julias" (Lk. 9:10; cf. Jn. 6:1 "on the other side of the Sea of Galilee" from Capernaum; Mk. 8:22, a blind man was healed there on "the other side," Mk. 8:13, after the discussion at Dalmanutha Magadan on the west bank, Mt. 15:39b; Mk. 8:10b) That two similarly-named cities, located so close together, should not be thought strange, since "Bethsaida," etymologically, may mean nothing more than "house of fishing" (*ISBE*, 451b), hence refer to the water-front fishing villages so-called from the occupation of their inhabitants.

The mighty works done in you. Although we have no record of miracles worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida (however, see notes on 8:14), yet in every part of the Gospel narratives are found evident summaries of much vaster extent of Jesus' labors. (Cf. Mt. 9:35; 4:23-25; Jn. 20:35; 21-25) Nevertheless, due to the proximity of these towns to Capernaum, the scene of much of Jesus' activity, as well as the headquarters of His Galilean campaigns, the many

miracles done in the city limits of Capernaum would have had repercussions in those other two adjoining communities located but a short walk away. On the other hand, if the "great day of miracles" (Mt. 8:14-17; Mk. 1:21-34; Lk. 4:31b-41) ended at Bethsaida in Galilee, rather than in Capernaum, then we have an excellent sample of **the mighty works done in Bethsaida**, since Peter and Andrew, at whose home that day was concluded, were originally from there and perhaps still lived there. (Jn. 1:44)

If . . . (they) had been done in Tyre and Sidon means that no such ministry of any of God's prophets had actually been carried out in those cities. While it is true that God's men had thundered against Tyre and Sidon time and again (cf. Isa. 23; Jer. 25:22; Ezek. 26:1—28:26; Amos 1:9, 10; Zech. 9:2-4), yet apparently God sent no prophet to bear the warnings of their destined judgment. The case of Nineveh and Jonah seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. The above-mentioned prophecies were delivered, then, for "local consumption" among the Jews themselves, as God gave them evidence of His planning. By declaring His counsel prior to its execution, He provided written proof that He is the Lord of history and ruled nations. Nevertheless, it was not His purpose to do **mighty works** in those pagan cities. To the Jews, then, the mention of these two Phoenician cities called up the image of typical pagan cities, ignorant of God's revelations and, as a consequence, morally degraded. Tyre and Sidon were geographically close enough to Palestine for their notorious wickedness to be generally proverbial among the Jews.

Foster (SLC-1957, 49) submits the interesting suggestion that Jesus may not have been looking at the ancient pagan cities in their own historical context, but rather was alluding to the modern cities of His day. However, if the Lord intended a parallel between Tyre and Sidon on the one hand with Sodom (11:23) on the other, in approximately the same sense in which He mentioned Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin together, then it becomes evident that He had only the ancient cities in mind, since Sodom had never been rebuilt and was no longer existing in the time of Christ.

They would have repented long ago. This is no hypothesis contrary to fact, notwithstanding the possibility that anyone could have levelled this objection to Jesus' affirmation. His assertion remains above challenge, if we admit the identity of the One who asserts it. Only God's omniscience could comprehend in its scope all possible actions, as well as what people actually do. The Master does not

hesitate to reveal what the wicked ancients **would have** done, and, by so doing, reveals His own identity even further. This impression is made the more evident by the solemn introduction prefixed to His pronouncement: **But I say unto you.** This is the authoritative voice which will pronounce the sentence **on the day of judgment.** These words encourage the vilest sinner to believe that, if these cities might have escaped their horrible fate by thorough-going repentance, there is hope for him too if he but repent.

Repented in what sense?

1. Does Jesus mean that full conversion to God that was expected of the chosen people? That would depend upon the precise nature and requirements of the message those pagan cities would have received. If that preaching were equal to the message supported by **the mighty works done in** Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum, then the Master means nothing short of full transformation.
2. If, however, He meant a message geared to the actual degree of maturity (or lack of it) at which those ancients lived, then He probably refers to that leaving off of their more heinous sins for which they had grown notorious. In this case God would not have destroyed them, even as He tolerated the continued existence of other relatively ungodly cities, until the times were right to provide them more complete revelations. (Cf. Ac. 17:30) It may be safe to decide this, since, in light of Jesus' principle, responsibility is equal to one's opportunity. For if these cities had no special revelation on the basis of which they could be deeply transformed, as had the Jews, then it could not be expected of them that they produce that of which they were psychologically incapable. (Cf. Ro. 10:14)

Sackcloth and ashes. The wearing of a rough, prickly hair-shirt next to the skin and the covering of one's head with annoying ashes (or also sitting in them) was the ancient way of expressing extreme sorrow and genuine repentance. (Cf. Isa. 58:5; Dan. 9:3; Jonah 3:5-10; Esther 4:3; Rev. 11:3) This bodily discomfort harmonizes well with the contrite attitude of one's spirit. Because it was obvious to all, it became a public recognition of one's contrition.

11:22 **More tolerable in the day of judgment than for you,** does not mean that these ancient, corrupt cities will get off scot-free at the judgment, in the sense that they would not be punished, or that they would be assured a place in God's paradise. The rule

still stands: responsibility equals opportunity. (Cf. Lk. 12:47, 48; Jn. 15:22-24; 9:40, 41; Ro. 2:12-16; 3:23-25) So there is no favoritism with God here, as if the corrupt Gentile cities might be thought to be judged by one standard and the Jews by another. The one standard for all is that of opportunity to know the truth and act upon it. So a man is responsible not merely for what he actually knows, but for what it was possible for him to know, but he chose not to recognize. (Cf. Ro. 1:18-28) One of the most excruciating parts of Hell is the burning within the conscience which screams to the suffered how much opportunity he had to receive God's loving grace. (Cf. Lk. 16:25) As a consequence, Jesus is not teaching that all the unsaved will suffer punishment of the same severity, since the gravity of guiltiness will vary with the opportunity.

Who would have supposed that judgment would reveal such a reversal of popular standards and upset estimates so commonly held? The jarring surprise caused by Jesus' declaration could not have been greater! One would have thought that of all people, surely those good Galilean neighbors of the Lord would be first in the Kingdom. What a lesson: the relative degree of a sinner's guilt may not come to the fore here on earth, and should never be used as a standard for measuring the guilt of others. Only the judgment of God will reveal the depth of one's guilt, since only then will the facts be bared that show how much opportunity one had to know and do God's will.

This is a judgment upon an attitude toward Jesus' message, but not absolutely irrevocable in the case of individuals, since some of these very townsmen could yet be won. This solemn declaration, then, is a fearful warning of a fate too dreadful to be conceived, deliberately worded to shake the complacent back to a sense of reality, calling them to repent before the hour of opportunity had elapsed.

11:23 And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Is this a question or an affirmation?

1. Affirmation (KJV: "Thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven . . .") Capernaum would naturally feel honored as a city whose face would soar to the gates of heaven itself, inasmuch as she could consider God's Son her most illustrious citizen. But taken in juxtaposition with the following phrase, this affirmation becomes ironic, since her temporal fame is not matched by eternal glory.
2. Question (ASV, RSV). This suggests that Jesus was verbalizing Capernaum's self-estimate: "You did not suppose that my mere presence among you would guarantee your eternal

fame and glory, did you? Wait till you hear your sentence read!"

The problem lies in the reading of the manuscripts, since *E, G, phi* and other Greek MSS as well as *f* and *q* among the Latin, the Siniatic and Peshitta Syriac have "And you, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven," where *K, M,* and other Greek MSS and *b* Latin have a similar variant: "And you, Capernaum, the one which has been exalted unto heaven." But contrary to these two variant readings, *Aleph, B, D, W, Theta, C,* many Latin MSS, the Vulgate; the Curetonian Syriac, the Sahidic, Bohairic and many other ancient translations have: "And you, Capernaum, you will not be exalted to heaven, will you?" (*mé béōs ouranoū bypsōthēsē;*). Since in the best judgment of the editors of the critical text, the latter reading has the best MSS support, this is a question expecting a negative answer.

Thou shalt go down into Hades. **Hades** most often refers to the unseen world of the dead, the tomb. Moreover it can also connote the fate of those dead whose punishment is sure, having been so destined by their passage beyond the realm of further opportunity to change. (Cf. Lk. 16:23) For this reason **Hades** may sometimes be used as a synonym for Hell. Which is it here, merely the obscurity of the grave and the oblivion in the dust of the centuries, or a fiery threat of eternal punishment?

1. The grave, historical oblivion.

ISBE, 1315b: "As in the OT Sheol is a figure for the greatest depths known (Dt. 32:22; Isa. 7:11; 57:9; Job 11:8; 26:6), this seems to be a figure for the extreme of humiliation to which that city was to be reduced in the course of history. It is true that ver. 24, with its mention of the day of judgment, might seem to favor an eschatological reference to the ultimate doom of the unbelieving inhabitants, but the usual restriction of Hades to the punishment of the intermediate state . . . is against this."

In this connection note also Isa. 14:13-15; Ezek. 26:20. So, without denying the threatened punishment of any who rejects Jesus, it may be possible to interpret figuratively **heaven** and **hades** in this verse, since in Jesus' mind they represent proper antitheses. Thus, in the same way that the

exaltation of Capernaum's citizens probably did not mean that they would all go to live in heaven, so their humiliation in hades need refer to no more than the material ruin of the city. Capernaum would lose her glory and privileges, falling to a level as far below other cities as she had been honored above them. The Jewish wars with Rome so thoroughly destroyed the city, that one might almost believe that those who overthrew it were bent on proving Jesus right.

2. Hell. Foster (*SLC-1957*, 50) argues that

The reference as to what will happen to Sodom in the day of judgment makes it plain that Jesus was not threatening Capernaum with a mere return of its fine buildings to rubble and its people to the grave. As a matter of fact, this was the fate of these cities within the scope of about a generation, but the warning of Jesus carried a more solemn import.

What would be the point in saying that unrepentant men shall be brought down to the grave? Where else would dying men go? The fate of these cities is determined by no other factor in this context than the obdurate indifference to repentance and faith. Temporal oblivion is too good for anyone who turns thumbs down on God's Son!

Go down into Hades. Though there is reasonably good manuscript evidence for the reading: "You shall be brought down to Hades" (*katābībāsthēsē*), a reading which suggests the active punitive justice of God, the reading chosen for the text is well supported. It raises the instructive problem in what sense unrepentant cities **go down into Hades**. God's judgment is often passive in its function. When men would have expected Him to rain fire from heaven upon the wicked, thus giving a world-shaking indication of His justice, sometimes He gives no sign at all, almost as if He were happily unconcerned. Why is He silent? Since He did not destroy Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida for their refusal to repent, as He did in the case of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, how could He be just? Often He simply withdraws His blessing after men prove themselves disinclined to appreciate them, thus leaving them to fend for themselves. When He thus abandons men to the logical consequences of their own choices, He is actually delivering them up to their own damnation. (Cf. Ro. 1:18-32, esp. 24, 26, 28) Further, it may well be that in the very hour, in which God's patient silence is interpreted by rebels as a motive for relaxing in their false security, God is

mixing for them a cup of wrath. Either way, the apparent silence of the Judge is fully as ominous as if He had taken immediate action. Men must not confuse God's long-suffering for weakness or forgetfulness.

To what city does Jesus compare His adopted hometown? **Sodom**, with the opportunities offered Capernaum, **would have remained until this day**. Out of this affirmation arise four truths:

1. A reminder of the appalling end of those wicked cities of the Plain. (Cf. Gen. 19:24ff.; Mt. 10:15; Lk. 10:12; 17:29) The historical ruin of these metropoli naturally lent itself to their proverbial use as symbols of divine punishment. (Cf. Isa. 1:9; Ro. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7; Rev. 11:8)
2. A solemn affirmation of the dreadful doom awaiting the Sodomites at Judgment. If they thought their earthly punishment had been terrible, they miscalculated God! This future justice is not, as some suppose, because the Sodomites rejected the angels sent to them, for God did not send them to save Sodom, but to retrieve Lot and his house. Sodom had already been condemned for sinning against the knowledge of God and righteousness it possessed.
3. A divine announcement that with the same challenge to know the truth given to Capernaum, Sodom would have repented and so never would have been cremated alive. This is no hypothesis contrary to fact, given the divine superhuman knowledge of the One who declares it. He who read the hearts of the Sodomites, now reads the consciences of these Galileans.
4. An encouraging hope: if Sodom would have been spared, despite the heinousness of her sin, **there remains a chance** for the vilest sinner who accepts the very Gospel that would have saved Sodom!

11:24 It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. (See on 10:15) This proposition contains several other presuppositions that deserve consideration:

1. Though Sodom had been extinct for almost two millenia before His coming, Jesus points out yet another day on which Sodom must stand with Capernaum to give account before God.

2. Death itself is not, therefore, all the punishment an individual can expect for his sins. After death there is also a judgment.
3. Though cremated alive for their sins, the Sodomites await yet future judgment. This means that punitive judgment on earth for one's sin is not the final satisfaction of absolute justice. That kind of summary vengeance may only mean that God speeded up the time left until death, immediately thereby eliminating the opportunities to continue sinning with apparent impunity.
4. Though horribly punished with death on earth, the Sodomites were not thereby annihilated. They are yet alive somewhere facing the final vindication of God's righteousness and their final sentence.

The fearful instruction of this section (11:20-24) is that while men still breathe, they are the absolute masters of the citadel of their hearts—their emotions, their intellect, their conscience and their will. God Himself in Jesus Christ chose to leave men absolutely free to throw open the gates of the fortress and surrender, or resist divine mercy clear to the bitter end. This means, of course, that in the present, Jesus is willing to let each unbeliever's private kingdom remain invincible. This also means that in the light of time, Jesus appears to be beaten, since He refuses to force man's surrender. But the Master knows that the few pages, necessary to tell anyone's entire life story, do not include the final denouement, for every man, rebel or friend, will one day bow the knee to Jesus and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (Phil. 2:9-11) Then it will be decided who was really invincible. Jesus can wait.

II. UNCONQUERABLE SUBMISSION (11:25-30)

A. JOYOUS THANKSGIVING (11:25, 26)

A superficial reading of the previous section, as suggested above, might tempt us to shake our heads in discouragement, since even the Son of God is apparently failing even to hold His own with the most favorable opportunities among the best contacts as He ministers among His own people. And if He fail there. . . ? But the Master is anything but beaten. Matthew leads us to a closer examination of what he himself learned to appreciate, i.e. how the Christ reacted to frustrating heart-crushing disappointments. Instead of flailing out or becoming bitter or accusing others of blundering and failure to evangelize properly, Jesus turns to God. The paradox is especially true of the Son of God: though invincibility and submission usually

mutually contradict each other, in Jesus they are nicely matched. He absolutely refuses to permit anything to hinder Him (here is His unconquerable spirit), turning Him aside from His responsibility to do exactly what His Father sent Him to do even if that means personal disappointments to Him (here is His real meekness and submission). Jesus knows that the secret of ultimate invincibility lies in submission—immediate, unhesitating, willing and continuous submission to the Father's desires. Would that we could learn that self-rule and invincibility are the real opposites!

11:25 **At that season** (*en ekeinō tō kairō*) is a most remarkable wording if Matthew is adhering to a strict chronological presentation in this chapter, for *kairos* ("season") often refers to a longer period of time than just a moment on the day when this discourse would have been presented. Further, Luke (10:21), in an almost exact parallel passage has "in that same hour" (*in autē tē hōrā*), as it were, to express the precise moment when Jesus prayed the very prayer here reported by Matthew in a loose general connection. Matthew knows how to be precise when the occasion calls for precision. (Mt. 8:13; 10:19; 18:1; 26:55) And He can speak loosely as necessary. (Mt. 12:1; 14:1; 11:25?) Perhaps the publican-Apostle has taken Jesus' prayer and observations from the Mission of the Seventy, which he does not intend to include, and uses it here because of its suitability to close this section in which he has illustrated the varying effects of the Lord's ministry upon those who came into contact with it.

Jesus answered and said, To whom or what is He making "answer"?

1. Is He responding to His own reflections upon the ignorance, unbelief and rejection found in the most favored cities. Only if these two parts of this section (i.e. 11:20-24 and 11:25-30) are chronologically connected.
2. Or is His answer a grateful response to the deep confidence in Him manifested by many humble disciples who were willing to come to Him, confessing, "Lord, you know everything I need to know. Teach me"? In this case, chronological connection is not so important, since the Lord is viewed as responding to a general situation. Matthew, then, sees the Lord as expressing His own answer to the climate of unbelief all around Him, contrasted with some evidences of simple trust.
3. Or, is it merely an introductory formula "common in Hebrew

narrative as an enlarged equivalent for 'said'?" (Plummer, *Matthew*, 165; cf. 17:4; 28:5; Deut. 21:7; Job 3:2; Isa. 21:9 in ASV)

I thank thee (*exomologōmai soi*). Since the verb *exomologōmai* means primarily "to confess, admit; acknowledge" and, the connotative meaning, "to praise" (See Arndt-Gingrich, 276), one might wonder why many English translations have it: "I thank thee." But when it is remembered that, by nature, our thanks is an acknowledgement of some favor or kindness received, a confession of our gratitude, this connection becomes more natural. Further, *exomologōmai* in the LXX period had already begun to include the more general sense of *praise*. (Compare the following especially in the LXX; Gen. 29:35; 2 Sam 22:50; 1 Chron. 29:13; Psa. 86:12 [85:12 LXX]; 118:28 [117:28 LXX]; 18:49 [17:50 LXX]; 35:18 [34:18 LXX]; Sirach 51:1) In all of these passages the idea of giving thanks is easily substituted with the idea of praise and vice versa. Vine (*EDNTW*, IV, 122) has it "I make thankful confession" or "I make acknowledgement with praise." In our dealings with God, the dual force of this word (*exomologōmai*) is most appropriate, since the nature of His gifts and loving care is such that we feel that we may *confess* our dependence upon him, *praise* Him for His graciousness and *thank* Him for His gifts almost all in one breath! It should not be surprising that pious Greek-speaking Hebrews should have found the one word that beautifully expresses all these ideas!

In addition, if Jesus feels the exuberant joy here, that is described by Luke, then it is more than psychologically credible that all these ideas be united in His mind. He is in high spirits, rejoicing as completely as if a great victory had just been won, even though He is realistically and frankly facing failure. The Lord has failed to win over those cities wherein most of His labor had been expended, and yet He gives thanks? Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 91ff.) senses this:

Jesus is frankly facing relative failure in His preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven to the people. Not that we are to suppose He was surprised, and in that sense, disappointed. The actual fact and experience of failure is, however, upon Him; and there is no prescience or preparation that can take away the grief and sting of failure to do the good to people to which one had devoted all his energy . . . Yet few would have agreed with Him that He was failing—probably not one would have agreed. He had never been more popular

... multitudes seek Him out on every opportunity, . . . They are ready to risk all and follow Him in revolt against all authority, religious and political . . .

Therein appears His superior insight. Here was for Him the mark of His failure. The people were missing the point of His appeal. They wanted a bread king. They wanted His miracle personality to perform in miracles of provision and protection, deliverance and defense while, unchanged in heart and life, they would enjoy a physical, a material Messianic reign. How it all wrung His soul and drove Him to prayer. He was calling them to repentance, they wished to follow Him to power. He wanted to get God into them, they wanted to get Him and God into their service. His soul is wrung in deep anguish, because of their deep need of repentance and their persistent unrepentance. He has tried so hard, so faithfully, unselfishly, so perfectly tried to give them God, and they have not seen it.

And yet, Jesus refuses to be downed by the failure implicit in His judgment of those cities. Instead He has a high heart and nothing but words of praise for God! What an exquisite expression of the very meekness He will shortly claim! This is no mere acquiescence: "I accept your wisdom, since I have no other alternative." There is no sorrowful, but dutiful, submission that whines, "I conform, because I feel that I should." Rather there is joy and satisfaction with God's plans: "I thank you—I praise you!" The depth of His meekness becomes evident when we examine who it is that stands here rejoicing despite the heartaches in being so limited: the only One who truly knows God and is perfectly understood by God, the One to whom the Father entrusted everything! (Mt. 11:27) Despite these divine prerogatives that might have seemed to guarantee Him the right to expect better treatment and greater success, He accepts being limited this way as part of His mission and the most excellent course.

The things which cause the Lord Jesus to rejoice and give thanks, should give us reason to reflect upon what pleases us. His strange thanksgiving challenges us to inquire into our easy satisfaction with those irrelevant, superficial symbols of success: our great crowds, our spacious cathedrals, our tight schedules, many programs and multitudes of meetings. What does He have to be so triumphantly glad about?

1. God is His Father and universal Sovereign. No matter what issues the intermediate conflicts may have, the ultimate victory

is safely in His hand. There is an unquestionable stabilizing effect in knowing that **the Lord of heaven and earth** is also our **Father**. Temporary setbacks, however heartbreaking they be, cannot upset the confidence that is founded on the invincible God! (Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4; Psa. 112:7)

2. Jesus can be grateful that elementary justice is already being done, since the intellectual aristocracy, so proud of its superiority, would for that very reason, be hindered from knowing the eternal truths, whereas the intellectually humble believers would actually recognize the divine wisdom.
3. Jesus can rejoice in the width of the abyss that separates the supreme majesty of God from the vaunted "greatness" of earth's "wise and understanding," who dare pit their limited understanding and unlimited pride against His wisdom and revelations. This contrast merely proves that God's efforts to save man do not rest in any way upon human intellect. Rather, intellectual talents, instead of being necessary, often get in the way. Jesus can praise God for working out a means of salvation that leaves God completely autonomous and that demands that man surrender his pride in order to understand.
4. He praises God that He, to whom all heaven and earth owe submission, mercifully stoops to bless the nobodies, the rankest beginner, the babes! For whom does Jesus give thanks? Often we are tempted to thank God for the rich, the powerful, the learned, the "beautiful people in our congregations, who are capable of giving an air of success and prosperity to our efforts, whereas He is grateful for those in whom FAITH dwells. He praises God for the marvellous vitality of those humble followers who are willing to brave the world's scorn in order to do things God's way.

Paradoxically, Jesus' cause for gratitude is the very limitation which had produced His greatest disappointment. God's plan for saving the teachable was working, even though this means the loss of those who were, by their own choice, unteachable.

Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes. These things involves all that Jesus had been trying to reach. This, in effect is the Gospel whereby men can be saved by trusting God, rather than by accumulating their own merits or depending upon the (presumed) merits of others. While its fundamental concepts are relatively

simple and within the grasp of all, this message is not designed to appeal only to the ignorant, but rather to the humble. (cf. 1 Co. 2:6-16)

Who are **the wise and understanding**? They are the aristocratic intellectuals, as well as the common man on the street, who believe they know too much to permit themselves to be duped into committing their lives into the hands of an itinerate, unauthorized rabbi like Jesus of Nazareth. (Study Jn. 7:48, 49; 9:40) The scribes and Pharisees, whose entire life was dedicated to the proposition that the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers, taken together, constituted the consummate wisdom of the ages, were not open to any new truth that did not sanction and revere the old as they understood it. And, because they refused to humble themselves before the truth preached by the Nazarene, they became the worst of idolaters, satisfying themselves with the half-god of their own imagination: the sum total of their theological deductions and speculations. (Compare the pagan's decline: Ro. 1:21, 22, 25, 28, 32)

This, of course, involves a preconditioning of pride and arrogance in order to be able to shut one's eyes to evidence. It also forces **the wise and understanding** to create another view of the universe that explains away the force of the facts and proof that contradict their pet theories and traditions. (Study 12:22-24; 9:32-34) But, in so doing, they move away from reality (as represented by Jesus), thus creating for themselves a world of unreality in which they choose to live. But to set one's mind against truth—whether physical, cosmic or ethical truth—causes a fearful hardening of the heart which blinds to those realities the individual who does it. It causes Him to manipulate the truth to suit himself. He will even rearrange God, His Word and His universe in his mind, molding them according to the dictates of the system he is substituting for God's. So many care not at all for truth: they neither long for it nor care about falsity (unless falsity brings them some immediate discomfort!) They are controlled principally by desires. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:3, 10-19; 3:3; Jas. 1:6-8, 13-15; 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:2, 3) They live by wishful thinking in this denial of unwelcome reality presented by the Lord. Despite the temporary and apparent relief from responsibility to recognize and live with reality; the tendency to ignore a reality hardens one to it. Airport noise, glue factories, alarm clocks, etc., are no longer noticed, if ignored long enough. There are none so blind as those who will not see, true enough, but it produces even deeper darkness to say "We see," while remaining indifferent or openly hostile to

God's truth revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. (Cf. Jn. 9:39-41; 2 Co. 3:12—4:6)

It is also quite natural for **the wise and understanding** to band together. Because they like to think this way, they encourage others to join them in an elite club of the worldly wise. Those who are reluctant to relax their grip on reality (i.e. the world as God reveals it through Jesus) are cajoled, embarrassed, black-mailed and otherwise threatened. (Cf. Jn. 9:22-34; 7:45-52; 12:9-11) The result is but a conspiracy against God and His people. (Cf. Jn. 16:1-4; Ac. 4:23-31, etc.) Substitute theories are popularized and termed "scientific explanations". Even though contrary evidence is presented, it is scorned, suppressed, and its apologists persecuted, harassed, demoted or simply ignored.

Further, **the wise and understanding** naively believe their lives to be very much under control. Paradoxically, a man will not stop sinning until he admits that he cannot stop. This is why **the wise and understanding** will remain what they are until they are willing to admit that they have been ignorant, deceived and conceited, until they confess that their human wisdom was leading them even further from God's truth, until they see that man is not the center of the universe nor the measure of all things. So it is that, when a man admits that he cannot stop trusting his own understanding and comes to Jesus, saying, "Lord teach me," only then does he really find the power to depend upon the Lord's wisdom.

Thou . . . didst reveal them unto babes. Who are the **babes**? They are not merely those unlearned, common men who made up the large percentage of Jesus' disciples (cf. Ac. 4:13; Jn. 7:45-49), but those who are willing to consider themselves as such. (Mt. 18:3, 4; Lk. 18:17) **Babes** are those who are intelligent enough—not to be so presumingly certain of their own conclusions, who are honest enough to admit the fine possibility that they do not know everything, even about the most common matters, whose general attitude is one of openness and willingness to learn. **Babes** are those who can learn from any and every one regardless of their own personal educational achievement, but who are critical enough themselves to be able to distinguish truth from error, good from bad advice, the precious from the worthless. **Babes** are those who are willing to judge the case on the weight of the evidence, rather than distort the evidence to suit their own preconceptions. **Babes** can see that, as sinners, their lives are unmanageable, out of control, that they have made a mess of them. In short, they are men who can

say with clear minds, but in deep revulsion of themselves, "I am a sinner—I have sinned." **Babes** are men whose minds are not so thoroughly jammed with false notions that have to be unlearned before divine truth can enter. The Lord can do a great deal with man whose thinking is relatively unencumbered with the educated nonsense expounded by the arrogant pseudo-intellectuals. But since most of us are troubled with the incompleteness and relative accuracy of much of our best information, Jesus is not so much concerned with the amount of true knowledge we have, but He is very much concerned with our attitude toward the truth that we think we possess.

How is it that God hides truth from **the wise and understanding**? Can He be just if He does this? How can He be justified in condemning those who do not see the truth which might have saved them? There are two sides to the answer:

1. Suppose we never arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question. It may well be difficult, by pondering and logic, to fathom how God is said to hide the truth from some men. We may never find out just how God could harden Pharaoh's heart (cf. Ex. 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:20; Ro. 9:14-18) or open Lydia's (Ac. 16:14). But even if so, until we do understand, we find ourselves before an excellent case of the necessity to trust God where our limited understanding fails to comprehend all parts of His plans or falls short of grasping the wisdom behind His choices. Were we to go no further, we could still answer the above questions by saying, "In terms of human understanding of justice, it may not seem right that God should hide the truth from some men and reveal it to others, but because I have learned to trust God on the basis of the evidence Jesus gives, I will also trust Him to be just and know what He is doing in this matter too."
2. But is the problem clearly stated? In the same way that particular predestination wrongly states its case elsewhere, so also here. Jesus is not referring to particular individuals who merely happen to be **wise and understanding**, but to classes of conceited people who, because of their vaunted culture and enlightenment, reject God's revelation. Any individual who overestimates the importance of his learning and experience and counts himself to be erudite and worldly wise in the sense rejected by Jesus, and puts himself into this class, will find himself strangely blinded and quite unable

to see any lasting significance in God's message. So, it is not true that God hides His life-giving truth from certain unfortunate individuals, thus predestining them to eternal damnation, while, at the same time, revealing His wisdom to other individuals, so saving them. Were "particular election" true, this entire passage could have no sense, since Jesus is lamenting the fate of people who could have chosen to repent. But if they could not have changed their personal, eternal destiny by repentance, according to the theory, God's Son had been wasting His efforts on them without knowing it!

Or, on the other hand, to state the problem differently, so as to get closer to its solution, has God set in motion certain natural, psychological laws, programmed into the human mind, whereby His truth can be assessed by EVERY mind? If all human brains operate in more or less the same way, then, seeing or failing to see God's truth revealed in Jesus Christ is not a question of the superior performance or functioning of the receiving equipment (the human intellect), nor the range of the transmitter (God), but of the willingness of the receiver's operator to turn on and tune his set. If all the radios operate more or less the same way and are so constructed as to pick up the frequency on which God is transmitting is it God's fault if some men turn Him off by dialing another frequency? The responsibility lies, then, with the hand that changes the dial.

But if this be the case, then how is it true that "**Thou didst hide these things?**" That is, if man himself hides the truth from his own eyes, how can it be said that God did this? As suggested above, because God created the human mind with its particular characteristics, He is responsible for knowing its limitations. Further it was He that chose to reveal truth that can only be received by humble, honest minds. He resolved that the Word of life shall not be broadcast so as to be intercepted on the channels of human wisdom, prudence or understanding. In a word, by limiting His broadcasting to this one frequency, God **hid these things from the wise and understanding**, because they are far too sure that all significant truth must come through human thought and discovery. Men were convinced that divine wisdom had to be announced by philosophers, sage rabbis, priests or kings, but when God sent a simple Galilean carpenter, this they could not accept. So, Jesus is discussing the inclination (or disinclination) to open one's mind to accept revelation, not the strength of that mind or one's intellectual gifts.

How does God reveal truth to babes? The word reveal is

the key to the fundamental difference between **the wise** and **the babes**: what are men willing to have told to them that they do not already think they know? If men believe they already know all there is to know that is significant, then revelation to them is impossible. However, God has chosen revelation as His means of communication, and by so doing, has quite literally hidden His truth from all those who choose not to be told anything they do not already know and approve. (See on 11:14; 13:10-17) At the same time, His truth gets through to all the rest. The express purpose of the Gospel is to dethrone self and enthrone God in men's hearts. Had the Father made the Kingdom of God the prize for human scholarship, then its message would have been grasped only by the few great intellectuals, but in this case it would have become the object of human achievement and the stimulus to pride and self-sufficiency. Such an approach would have defeated the purpose the Gospel was intended to accomplish. But by addressing His message to all who are humble, the Lord brings it within reach of everyone who is willing to descend from his throne and exalt God to His rightful place. Luke 10:23, 24 indicates how distance in time from Jesus of Nazareth kept some men from seeing God's truth perfectly revealed, a limitation of which they were not responsible, but by which they were nonetheless hindered. But the blessing pronounced upon the disciples was occasioned, not by the accident of birth that chanced to drop them into the same time schedule on earth with Jesus, but because they permitted themselves actually to perceive in Jesus what the self-praising religious analysts were unable to fathom, because these latter were unwilling to acknowledge it. Mt. 13:16, 17 clarifies this concept: "Blessed are your eyes BECAUSE THEY SEE . . ." For example, God revealed Jesus' true identity and mission to Peter, while this same vital information remained unpalatable and, consequently, unappreciated and unknown to the Jewish hierarchy! (Cf. Mt. 16:17; 1 Co. 2:8.) But the same evidence God gave Peter was also at the disposal of the scholars. The difference in the evaluations lay in the evaluators.

Christianity is for the weak. The problem is that men dislike the awful tension of being weak in a world that demands that they be strong. As a result, they are greatly tempted to prove themselves strong—to themselves and others—by illegitimate means that equivocate their dependence upon God or anyone else. Least of all does anyone wish to admit his own intellectual inferiority and dependence. But in the presence of the Almighty, one can hardly confess anything else

but weakness, inferiority and dependence. It is a shame that so many miss the point of this sort of confession, when they suppose that to admit this means to deny some part of their essential humanity. But belief does not require intellectual dishonesty or mediocrity to have validity, just intellectual humility. Christ can make weak men strong, if they but confess their need of Him and seek His power. (Cf. Jer. 1:6, 7; 2 Co. 11:30; 12:9, 10) Irreligious people who seem so strong are often people who have not been tested, are yet young enough, rich enough to maintain a substantial level of autonomy. But just let some of these factors fall below subsistence levels and put them through some real crises that try men's souls and then judge their strength. Unbelief is no evidence of a person's intellectual superiority or of some inadequacy in the evidence upon which faith could be founded. Unbelief may only be proof of the unbeliever's prejudiced standpoint, his own limited grasp of the available information and his unbounded self-esteem. Jesus does not condemn intellectual excellence any more than He condemns the mere possession of wealth. But He does point out the danger inherent in both: idolatry. He who bows before a mental concept of his own devising is no less an idolator than the man who kneels at Mammon's altar.

The Apostle Paul could measure the exact distance between **the wise and understanding** and **the babes**, between the effects of a false education and viewpoint, and the knowledge of Christ, because he had personally covered that distance in his own spiritual pilgrimage. When he announced his estimate of the Jewish tradition at its highest, most scholarly level, he describes it as "rubbish" (Phil. 3:8), not because Hebrew culture was deliberately false or calculatingly wicked but because of its false view of reality in rejecting God's Messiah. The scholars of Jesus' day could give a number of apparently valid reasons for rejecting the "untenable claims of that Nazarene," reasons that would have been perfectly consistent within the framework of the accepted system of thought. But once reality broke through this system that was permeating Paul's mind, when he met Jesus face to face on the Damascus highway, he was shocked with the realization that his perfectly consistent system was based upon a false premise that ignored true reality (as opposed to the imagined reality in the Jewish system that invented a Messiahship for God to respect.) Saul of Tarsus bowed before the evidence, while many of his brilliant contemporaries did not.

Jesus could see the future judgment with unerring eye and rejoiced because the very laws, which were set in motion to save the

saveable, were functioning perfectly. People were actually coming into God's Kingdom in God's way! The proud, the unrepentant, those who deemed themselves **wise and understanding**, the self-satisfied, those who sat on both the throne and cathedra of their own lives, those, in short, who refused God's rule and wisdom, were damning themselves. The Kingdom of God was right on course! (Study notes on Mt. 3:2, 15; 4:17) Those whom God wanted to be saved—the little people who had so little other chance for greatness or godliness in this life, but who wanted to do things God's way—these were really grasping the fundamental truth of God's message. The publicans, the harlots, the demon-possessed, the simple, common people of the land, because of their open-hearted response to Jesus, stood out in bold contrast with the Pharisees and others who made laws for God to keep! Nevertheless, Jesus puts no premium upon either ignorance or stupidity as qualifications for recognizing His divine wisdom. Intellect, per se, is no disqualification, nor are all simple people qualified. Intellectual power or its opposite are simply immaterial, for Jesus is describing the MORAL qualifications of the individual who would be examining His revelations. A man does not have to be either an intellectual or a simpleton to be able to trust Jesus, just humble, whatever his intellectual gifts or deficiencies.

God in his wisdom chose not to save the comparatively righteous or to damn the relatively wicked. He elected to remove the old man completely, since, when judged by absolute perfection, he can only be condemned, because he does not measure up. Therefore, it is only when we stop justifying ourselves and judging ourselves somehow to be worthy, when we stop living by our self-rule and stop walking by sight, when we begin life under Jesus' direction, that we can see what God is trying to tell us about life and truth. The trouble with **the wise and understanding** is that they think they have sufficient understanding, that they are already righteous in any way that is really important, that they have enough. (Cf. Rev. 3:17; 1 Co. 4:8) They want to preserve something "worthy" in themselves and not surrender to death, letting the whole life be sacrificed. The news that God has already condemned ALL men is totally unacceptable to them. After all, they argue, we're no great sinners! But the greatest of all sins is to be conscious of none. The very next scene which chronologically takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee, so well illustrates this problem. (Study Lk. 7:36-50) Look at that woman standing at Jesus' feet, without any pretenses or demands, weeping in appreciation of her Lord and fully knowing that

Jesus knows all about her. She is not trying to save face: she would save her soul! Then, by contrast, study the Pharisee who feels no sin. How little he understood, how little he loved, how little he repented, how little he was forgiven! The **babe** is one who is willing to come out in public, even in the house of hypocrites, and admit his sin, wanting to do anything for Jesus,—even wash feet while listening to the sarcastic remarks of others. Such are willing, as was the Prodigal Son, even to face one's own self-righteous older brother.

Wise and understanding . . . babes. Even though the Master uses these categories to describe widely contrasting attitudes people have toward truth, it does not follow that any individual who finds himself in one or the other class will always remain there. The very work of the Gospel proclamation involves dealing with those prejudices held by any who feel that their own wisdom, their own reasons, are sufficient to reject Jesus. And if such people hear the Gospel presented often enough and persuasively enough, they may be induced to admit the folly of their wisdom and turn themselves over to Jesus after all. Further, a person who was once open to the tender appeals of the Lord may someday awaken to the realization that the Lord no longer really dominates his life and this former **babe** has then become **wise and understanding** in his own eyes, so much so that even Jesus Himself can no longer make Himself understood to this man. This former **babe**, now well-versed in Christianity, has made himself insensitive to the call of God, despite his constant familiarity with it. The Apostles were constantly doing battle with their own understanding of Jesus and His program. (Cf. Lk. 9:45; 18:34; Gal. 2:11ff.) One's own self-satisfaction ("I know enough, I am good enough, I am doing enough"), is just as blinding to spiritual light today as religious pride in Jesus' day. This is why we must consent to die to self and live only for Him. To become and remain what Jesus means when He speaks of **babes**, we must be willing to say, "The self that I thought so righteous, justly deserved death. I accept the sentence of death and die to my rationalizations, self-defence and self-rule. I now submit my understanding to the test of the truth that Jesus guarantees, always remembering that I may well have an imperfect grasp even of His truth." This is why Christ's servant must constantly ask himself whether he is eager to learn new truth that he did not already know, whether he really be prompt to obey and sensitive to Jesus' desires.

God has always been using **babes**, the few, the foolish, the weak, to confound the strength, numbers and wisdom of the self-

confident. (Cf. Is. 29:14; 1 Co. 1:19, 26ff.; 2:6ff.; 3:18-21; Psa. 8:3 and notes on Mt. 21:16) The Lord had chosen these unknown, trusting men to pit them against all the wisdom, wealth and power of the foremost leaders in Israel, and ultimately, in the world. Jesus may have been rejoicing to see that the establishment of the Kingdom on earth was first to be done by poor, weak instruments (as the powerful of earth would judge them), for He could see that even this tactic would be a strong argument in its favor, for men would be drawn to admit that the greatness of the power operative in such a movement must be God's! (2 Co. 1:9; 4:7; 12:9, 10) But never let that calumny stand that would scorn them as "unlearned, common men" (Ac. 4:13)! Though they had studied in no recognized school of the day, they sat under the unique instruction of the only Rabbi accredited by the Father.

What effect would this prayer have had upon the disciples who heard it? Would they have immediately grasped the great issues that are involved here? Perhaps the Lord said more than Matthew's summary includes, in which case they might have sensed more readily the Master's meaning. That He should give praise and thanks to God for such relatively insignificant men as these, must have touched them deeply.

Bruce (*Training*, 102, 103) takes another point of departure. Instead of looking at the theological objections levelled at Jesus by the hierarchy, he examines the objections they may have had to His methods and procedure. Consider also his application:

The reference in the thanksgiving prayer of Jesus to the 'wise and prudent' suggests the thought that these evangelistic efforts were regarded with disfavour by the refined, fastidious classes of Jewish religious society. This is in itself probable. There are always men in the church, intelligent, wise and even good, to whom popular religious movements are distasteful. The noise, the excitement, the extravagances, the delusions, the misdirection of zeal, the rudeness of the agents, the instability of the converts—all these things offend them. . . .

None of the 'wise and prudent' knew half so well as Jesus what evil would be mixed with the good in the work of the kingdom. But He was not so easily offended as they. The Friend of sinners was ever like Himself. He sympathized with the multitude, and could not, like the Pharisees, contentedly resign them to a permanent condition of ignorance and depravity. He rejoiced greatly over even one lost sheep

restored; and He was, one might say overjoyed, when not one, but a whole flock, even *began* to return to the fold. . . . His love was strong and where strong love is, even wisdom and refinement will not be fastidious.

. . . . Another class of Christians, quite distinct from the wise and prudent, in whose eyes such evangelistic labours as these of the twelve stand in no need of vindication. Their tendency, on the contrary, is to regard such labours as the whole work of the kingdom. Revival of religion among the neglected masses is for them the sum of all good-doing. Of the more still, less observable work of instruction going on in the church they take no account. Where there is no obvious excitement, the church in their view is dead, and her ministry inefficient. Such need to be reminded that there were *two* religious movements going on in the days of the Lord Jesus. One consisted in rousing the masses out of the stupor of indifference, the other consisted in the careful, exact training of men already in earnest, in the principles, and truths of the divine kingdom. Of the one movement the disciples, i.e. both the twelve and the seventy, were the agents; of the other movement they were the subjects. And the latter movement, though less noticeable, and much more limited in extent, was by far more important than the former; for it was destined to bring forth fruit that should remain—to tell not merely on the present time, but on the whole history of the world.

If Bruce's observations seem to miss the main point Jesus is making, let it be remembered that we have yet a great deal to learn from the Lord, especially about methods; and it is often at this point that we need to acknowledge our ignorance and, as babes, learn from Him.

11:26 Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. This subordinate clause depends upon 11:25 for its principle verb (*exomologotimai*, "I praise and thank thee") and provides us Jesus' second expression of thanks or praise for the Father. Whereas before He praised Him for His absolute sovereignty, here the Son's emphasis is upon God's good pleasure, His *eudokia*. (Cf. uses of *eudokia* in Lk. 2:14; Phil. 1:15; 2:13; 2 Th. 1:11; Eph. 1:5, 9 unites these two concepts of the absolute sovereignty of His will and the emotional impact of God's pleasure. See also Lk. 12:32; 1 Co. 1:21; Col. 1:19)

Barnes' personal expression of confidence in the wisdom of God is worthy of repetition here. (*Matthew-Mark*, 123)

(The proud and haughty scribes and Pharisees) rejected his gospel, but it was the pleasure of God to reveal it to obscure and more humble men. The reason given, the only satisfactory reason, is, that it so seemed good in the sight of God. In this the Savior acquiesced . . . and in the dealings of God it is fit that all should acquiesce. *Such is the will of God* is often the only explanation which can be offered in regard to the various events which happen to us on earth . . . (it) is the only account which can be given of the reason of the dispensations of his grace. Our understanding is often confounded. We are unsuccessful in all our efforts at explanation. Our philosophy fails, and all that we can say is, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good to thee." And this is enough. That GOD does a thing, is, after all, the best reason which we can have that it is right. It is a security that nothing wrong is done; and though now mysterious, yet light will hereafter shine upon it like the light of noonday. I have more certainty that a thing is right if I can say that I know such is the will of God, than I could have by depending on my own reason.

One of the clearest lessons of this text is that Jesus does not expect to save the whole world. It tears at His great heart, but He will not relent. Even though He yearns to rescue everyone, yet He is willing to say even here, "Not my will, but yours, be done." He is grateful that this psychological law, which permitted God's truth to be concealed even while it was being revealed, was God's idea, God's will. (Study 1 Co. 1:30; 2 Co. 4:4)

B. MAJESTIC SELF-REVELATION (11:27)

How can Jesus be so sure that this psychological law, which automatically excludes the proud Pharisee while at the same time opens God's truth to the humble disciple, is in perfect agreement with the eternal counsel of God? This critical question receives its resounding answer in the magnificent claim now expressed.

11:27 **All things have been delivered unto me of my Father.** What were **all things** that were delegated to the Son? Plummer (*Luke*, 283) is right to notice that "it is arbitrary to confine the *panta* (i.e. **all things**) to the *potestas revelandi*" (i.e. right to reveal. See also the expository sermon "Rest in a Restless World" which follows.)

1. All authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18; Heb. 2:8, 9; Dan. 7:14; 1 Co. 15:24-28; Jn. 3:27-36).
2. Power on earth to forgive sins (Lk. 5:24).
3. Right to be Lord of the living and the dead (Ro. 15:8, 9).
4. Inheritance of all things (Heb. 1:2; 2:10; 1 Co. 8:6).
5. All glory and honor, a position superior to angels (Heb. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11).
6. The responsibility to suffer for all (Heb. 2:8, 9).
7. The headship over the Church (Eph. 2:22).
8. The authority to judge all men (Jn. 5:22).

There could be many more. Nevertheless, the most important prerogative claimed by Jesus in this context is primarily the unique knowledge of God. Such a claim is common in John's Gospel (cf. 3:35; 6:46; 7:29; 10:14, 15; 13:3; 17:2, 25), but so utterly unique in so outspoken a form in the Synoptic Gospels (although there are numerous allusions and a few widely-scattered but clear declarations like this one), that this claim has been rejected by some as a genuine utterance of the Lord. However, no critical evidence in the manuscripts can be presented to undermine its authenticity as part of Matthew's Gospel. It can only be discredited in circles where prejudice makes its truth unwelcome. It is interesting to notice that this kind of claim has never been popular in intellectual circles because, if Jesus is right, such a statement declares false or, at best, totally inadequate men's best efforts to arrive at absolutes and truth without going by way of Jesus. And **the wise and understanding** just do not like to be told that they are wrong. Some of the best brains of Jesus' day used this kind of utterance against Him to crucify Him. It is Jesus' highest claim to exclusive knowledge of God. We must feel this exclusiveness: it puts us on the outside. **My Father** speaks of a relationship shared by no other. (Cf. Jn. 5:17, 18) **The Son** refers to One who is unique among all other sons of God.

Is Jesus speaking here of a past fact (**have been delivered**) or by anticipation? That is, did He at that moment actually possess all that He claims? Yes, because He sees the Father's sending Him to earth and committing all these tremendous responsibilities to Him as one act. All the pain and glory that is involved in being the Son of God was part of His commission.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 454), citing Luther, points out the perfect balance in Jesus' deity and perfect humanity:

By this he indicates that he is true man, who has received them from the Father. For neither would God deliver all things to one who was only man, nor would one who was only God received them from another. For neither is it possible for one who is only man to be over all things, nor for one who is only God to be beneath God. Thus in this one person true God and true man are joined together.

Luther argues his case well but we must also weigh Jesus' next statement into our conclusions.

No man knoweth the Son. This very assertion gives us reason to re-study and re-examine all that we thought we ever knew about Him. As we struggle to understand Jesus' divine and human nature, and as we try to comprehend His earthly ministry and interpret His message, we must hold lightly our own interpretations, lest they become more decisive in our deliberations, than the very Word of Christ itself. Though He came to earth with the specific intention to reveal God, and though He let Himself be seen, heard and studied, there was always that other side of Jesus, His infinite deity that staggers men's minds and keeps Him just beyond their complete grasp of His nature. Note how unobtrusively Matthew admits to being one of those very few Galileans who did not presume to know all there was to know about the Master. He simply quotes Jesus' words without qualification or personal reservation. He might have said, as do modern critics in their estimates of the historical Jesus, "His affirmation, that no one really understood Him, may have been true when He said it, but we have Him figured out now!" The favored cities of Galilee too thought they knew Jesus, but their conceit prohibited them from recognizing anything more in Him than just another Nazarene carpenter, or perhaps as another Galilean rabbi whose opinions were to be added to the ever-growing body of scribal traditions. But lest we hide our own limited knowledge behind repeated criticisms of the unbelieving Jews, let us ask ourselves whether, with our greatly increased opportunities to know the completed revelation as presented and explained by the Apostles in the NT, we have done any better. Do we know the Son, His attitudes, His methods, what He was trying to get us to understand about God, the world, sin, life and eternity?

Neither doth any know the Father save the Son. Feel the stupendous impact of this bold declaration made by a young Hebrew who stands before the entire world and cries, "If you would really know the heart, mind, nature and will of God, look at me!

Come to ME, learn from ME. I am the only Person who really knows God! All who came before me are liars, thieves and robbers." (Cf. Jn. 14:9; 1:18; 10:1; 1 Jn. 5:20) The grand significance of this statement is that there is no God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! We must believe that Jesus is the exclusive authority and our only necessity, for, if He is right, there can be no other way back to God than through Him. (Jn. 14:6) People demand free-thought, because they do not want Jesus' authority over their lives. But if they would see God, they must honor the Son by submitting themselves totally to His authority! (Jn. 5:23, 24) And Christians cannot rule their lives and still call themselves His disciples, for Jesus recognizes no peer nor rival. But His authority or right to rule is implicit in His knowledge and revelation of the Father. This claim must have been positively scandalous to Jesus' Hebrew audience, for He is claiming a knowledge of God that no prophet, seer or sage either before or after Him, could pretend.

And he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.

Jesus' own thanksgiving (11:25, 26) certifies that His own will is in perfect agreement with the Father's good will, hence those to whom Jesus **wills to reveal** these mighty truths are the **babes** of 11:25. There is here no arbitrary selection of certain persons to whom this knowledge is granted. Rather, Jesus graciously invites all men, trying to lead them to lay aside their prejudices. His grace is sincerely offered to every man, but He has chosen that only those who are humble shall receive it. His will remains a closed book to condemn those who can, but will not, study it, because their lives are occupied with *other things, their minds* already jammed with human wisdom. **The Son willeth** (*boûletai*). There is a choice that has been made. Jesus decided not to give the same intimate revelation to those who prove themselves definitely wicked, as He would to those who submit to Him as trusting disciples. So this declaration is all of a piece with the presuppositions inherent in everything Jesus has been saying throughout this entire passage. That none are to be excluded, except by the exercise of their own will, is proved by the universality of the following invitation. (See on 11:28) Yet, as Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 98) points out:

It is a thousand pities that men have paused at this point in the pouring out of His soul in anguish of longing to make men know the Father—paused to build metaphysical theories in theology while the Redeemer's heart breaks with longing for lost men who will not heed. . . . He is as far

as possible from thinking of barring any from the Father. He is setting before Himself the problem of how to get men to this knowledge that gives eternal life. It is the cry of the Savior, not the dogma of a theologian, that we hear from Him. He knows the Father, He is in a world in which He finds no man who knows Him, all men must know Him or they have missed the whole meaning of life and had better never have been born. . . . He must make them know His Father. . . . How? . . . He offers Himself as the way to the Father.

D. PLEADING, UNIVERSAL INVITATION (11:28-30)

How does this passage fit together with the sections preceding it? Only the fact that Jesus possesses full authority qualifies Him to issue this universal invitation. The connection is perfect, since Jesus has just described Himself as the only One qualified to reveal the Father. Now He invites all men to be His students.

To whom is this invitation addressed? **All ye that labor and are heavy laden.** Upon first reading, this attractive offer seems limited to a single, particular group: the down-trodden, oppressed masses. But reflection reveals that sooner or later every human being finds himself caught by unexpected changes in life that leave him sorrowing, burdened, anguished and frustrated. The ancient Hebrews had understood this, and they expressed themselves in what makes an excellent and striking background for Jesus' bold declaration. (See Ecclesiasticus, 40:1-9) Life itself, with its seemingly interminable and apparently inevitable cares, becomes a galling yoke to those who have no choice but to keep their noses to the grindstone. Even those who are in some measure successful become aware of the fact that they must maintain their success with an even greater expenditure of strength, even though their resources are failing.

It is worthy of note that many of our trials are of our own choosing, because they are based upon some concept of life that holds us firm in that situation. We feel bound by our principles to remain in that situation and suffer the trial. But if it is a false concept of life for which we suffer, in Jesus' discipleship it would lose its importance and power, as it would be submerged into reality as Jesus preaches it. Too often men measure life by an unreal standard and then scourge themselves mercilessly for failing to meet it. Ironically, such false standards are not the things that truly matter in the final analysis.

It is not physical work or mental activity that drains us, leaving us weak, frustrated and burdened for one day's work. We were designed to work—and work well. We function best when we are profitably and contentedly working. But here is the catch: much of our work is neither profitable nor pleasing. And even in our best work we fail to achieve all our goals. Our hopes far exceed our realization. The tedium of routine sets in to dull our interest and increase both our boredom and our fatigue. On the other hand, the goals that Jesus sets before us, and the prospects of realizing them, gives us direction, stimulation, security, and, as a consequence, real rest, even though we may have even more work to do and more responsibility as His disciples than ever before. Life takes on a new significance, even daily tasks glow with new meaning.

But in this Jewish context is Jesus talking about the aches and pains of everyday living? Yes, and more, for His emphasis is also a moral one.

1. He is talking about the moral struggle to live up to the divine standards.

a. This constant measuring oneself with God's perfection is a discouraging, heart-breaking disappointment! (Cf. Gal. 5:1; Ac. 15:10; Ro. 7:21-24) In the end, without the victory and power of Jesus, ours is a losing battle to be good enough. (See notes on 5:48 and Notes Introductory to the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, pp. 184ff., esp. 190.) This invitation, then, is Christ's answer to the dubious and the desperate who are afraid that His ideals are un-reachable. Jesus knows that, without His life in us, there is even more bondage and frustration in trying to imitate Him, than there is in any other law. This is why He invites the hopeless and the skeptics to come to Him, so He can make them over, empowering them to be all that they dream.

b. But Jesus' hearers were not merely struggling with God's requirements. They were also measuring themselves by human standards mistaken for divine law. (Cf. 23:4; Lk. 11:46) Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 102) describes this:

He was thinking of the drudging burden of the endless round of ceremonial exactions, petty negotiations, shallow dogmas, formal duties with which the religionists of the day loaded life down until

it seemed impossible for the ordinary man to be godly. . . .

Plummer (*Matthew*, 169) summarizes it:

The scribes could not give rest to souls which He can promise (note the emphatic *kagō*) "They bind heavy burdens (*phortia*) and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders' (23:4); but His burden (*phortion*) is light. This shows that 'heavy laden' (*pephortisménoi*) does not refer primarily to the load of sin, but to the burdens which Pharisaic interpretations of the law imposed, and which, after all, gave no relief to men's conscience; . . . The heavy load of observances which gave no relief and perhaps also to the sorrows of life, which, apart from the consolations of a true faith, are so crushing. To those worn out with restless seeking . . . to those who are weighed down with unprofitable burdens . . . (Jesus offered His invitation.)

2. But that He includes also all of the weary, burdensome toil of sin and the suffering that accompanies it, is evident from the consideration that Jesus' discipleship has a unifying power to make us at peace with ourselves. Most of us are "walking civil wars", because of our divided heart. We are determined to try to serve both God and Mammon, have our fling with the flesh and still reap a harvest of righteousness in the Spirit. But this tension can only break us, since only God's world is the true one, only His rules function and bring us true joy. The other name for that tension, wherein we try to live in God's world and yet run it by our own rules, is "sin!"

All ye that labor and are heavy laden: here again Jesus' shepherd heart expresses His full, deeply-felt compassion for the shepherdless, harrassed and helpless sheep. (Cf. 9:36) And when He says **all**, He means it with that same generous universality found everywhere in His teaching: "Whosoever will, may come." (Cf. Rev. 22:17; Mt. 10:32; 12:50; 16:25; 18:4; Jn. 3:16; 4:14; 6:37; 11:26) Here is your personal invitation: include yourself in this category of "**all ye that labor**". Let no one imagine that he does not come under this invitation or that God might have other plans for saving him. This is it!

Come unto me. The great ones of earth maintain a strict reserve of inaccessibility around them. In contrast, Jesus is not only willing to be approached by "just anybody," but even graciously invites us! Imagine a 30-year-old Jew spreading His arms to receive the entire human race, saying, "All you who have any problems, come to me and I will help you!" Said by any other person, these words either sound ludicrous or border on blasphemy. The Jews were accustomed to this invitation made by Wisdom personified in their literature. (Cf. Prov. 8—9:6; Ecclesiasticus 24:19; 51:23-27) Further they had even heard great rabbis invite students to come for instruction. But never before had they heard anyone offer himself as the *unique solution* to all the deepest problems of the human race. As in the case of Jesus' miracles, so also here with His claims, truth and justice demand that we dismiss Him as a raving maniac, crucify Him as an imposter or bow before Him as our God. **I will give you rest.** This is just like Jesus to help the struggling, the unsuccessful, the weak and unworthy. (Mt. 12:20) Yet this is distinctly God's work. (Ex. 33:14; Jer. 31:25) How ill the Nazarene conceals His identity, if He wants none to mistake Him for God come in the flesh!

Come to me . . . I will give you rest. The extremely personal nature of this invitation is absolutely amazing, for Jesus presents us no formal system of philosophy or theology, no writings containing abstract theories, no new legal system or package of simple answers to the world's ills. He knows that we have had enough of that already. Instead, He is offering Himself! No doctrine or philosophy could ever do for us what our intimate fellowship with Jesus can.

11:29 **Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.** The **yoke** is a symbol well-known to the Hebrews, standing for control, discipline, obligation and even bondage. (Cf. Isa. 9:4; 1 Tim. 6:1; 1 Kgs. 12:4; Ps. 2:3 LXX; Jer. 5:5; 27:1—28:17; Psalms of Solomon 7:9; 17:30; Ac. 15:10; Gal. 5:1; 2 Co. 6:14) We cannot help feeling the contrast in Jesus' mind between **MY yoke** and all the other burdens borne by the weary and heavy-laden. But this very contrast suggests that even Jesus' yoke is definitely a kind of control, an obligation, a discipline. If so, then He is making it crystal-clear that He is not merely our Friend and Example. He is to be our Lord and Master. Rather, our new relationship to Him requires of us that we be willing to learn truth from Him and obey His voice, in the same way that the Jews felt their obligation to the Law and

discipline of Moses. **Take my yoke upon you** means that we are to submit to Him by our own free decision and deliberate resolve. Freedom in Christ cannot mean an absence of any control whatever, for that would mean antinomian anarchy. The greatest freedom from that tyranny that would enslave and destroy self is to be found by placing self completely under the dominion of Christ.

Learn of me, stated in clearer modern English is simply: "Learn from me." (*μάθητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ*; cf. Col. 1:7 *ἐμάθητε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρά*) Obviously, the **rest** Jesus offers is not an eternity of boring inactivity, since He envisions a discipleship of learning and activity. The joy of comradeship with the Lord in doing God's will, in our struggle with temptations and in our efforts to bring men into the Kingdom, is the very kind of labor that leaves our spirits rested and refreshed, even though our work is never completely or perfectly done. But before we could ever hope to begin such a task we must learn from him. Those who know not this fellowship nor this hope, cannot know the psychological strength that comes from it. They can but face the unabated frustrations of the present and the dark unknowns of the future.

What must we learn from Him? Frankly, everything. We see immediately that the righteousness which accords with God's will is not a ritual consisting in certain external observances but rather a meek and lowly heart. Because He too is a human being, notwithstanding His undoubted deity, we can imitate Him. We find inspiration and motivation to attempt His challenging ideals, because He deliberately set us an example for imitation. (Phil 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 2:21ff.) The **yoke** and the **burden** He gives us are His exacting requirements, but with His power working in us, the possibilities of realization are by far so much greater. This Teacher is one who was first a learner Himself. (Heb. 2:14-18; 5:7-9) He Himself has submitted to the very yoke He would have us wear. His example not only teaches us how to wear ours well, but, since we have seen the joyous result of His life, we are the more encouraged to shoulder it. (Cf. Heb. 12:3)

Learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart. Jesus is inviting us to investigate His method, meet Him personally and enroll in His school. Tenderly He motivates us to find in Him a Teacher that is kind and patient with slow students. **I am meek and lowly in heart.** (Cf. 5:5; 21:5; Nu. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:1) Scan the ministry of Jesus and count the times He proved this proposition true. In how many ways did He do things to which no ordinary oriental monarch would have stooped? How did He act in a manner unthink-

able to the kind of typical rabbi described in Mt. 23 and Lk. 11? Something of the importance of this observation can be felt by analyzing Jesus' public reputation as the one who "welcomes sinners and eats with them"! (cf. Lk. 15,1, 2) The Lord is not merely discussing His own personal character here, but also the methods He will use with His disciples, for His methods with each one, grow out of His own nature. What a contrast He makes to those harsh teachers who only know how to demand that the pupil rise to his duty, but who do not know how to motivate the poor learner to desire above all else to learn how to do what he knows is right. Nor is the Lord satisfied to sit in the cathedra of heaven and dictate lectures on religion and ethics. He is personally concerned that the dullest students, as well as the most brilliant, achieve their own personal best.

These gentle, comforting words, so easy for us to accept now, must have been a message difficult to believe for many in Jesus' audience. John the Baptist had hoped that the Christ would have seized the reins of government, destroyed the wicked leadership that was corrupting the nation, and usher in the Kingdom of the Messiah. This was the heart-cry of every Nationalist among Jesus' hearers, it was an ambition not entirely absent from the breast of the Apostles. Instead of giving Himself out to be the mighty Messianic Warrior-King ready for violence and civil revolution, the Lord quietly but firmly insisted: **"I am meek and lowly in heart!"**

Rest for your souls. While the wise and godly Hebrew sought rest for his soul in the contemplation of wisdom (cf. Ecclesiasticus 6:18-31, esp. v. 28; 51:27), Jesus boldly asserts that true rest is only available to those who learn from HIM. He presumes that only His Word is the true wisdom, the only ultimate truth of real permanence. (Cf. Mt. 11:27; 7:24-27; 24:35; Jn. 14:6) "Learn from me (and) you will find rest for your souls" is no empty promise if He has the right to say this, for one will find no satisfying rest outside of the reality represented in Jesus' message. The easy way to do a difficult task is to use the proper methods and equipment. There is nothing so fatiguing, so frustrating and, ultimately, so unsatisfying as to struggle with the difficult task, using inadequate equipment. It is the Lord's plan to equip us thoroughly for every good work. (2 Ti. 3:16, 17) By doing things His way, our struggle to accomplish the very same task, no matter how difficult, becomes easy by contrast to our own inadequate methods. We notice the repose when we change over to His system, because it rests us while we work. But even this simple promise puts to the test the reality of our confidence

in Him, for we must decide whose world is real, whose instructions are the true ones. For so long as we continue to do things our way, we will continue to dash ourselves against the harsh realities that contradict our pet notions. So doing, we will never find peace and rest. This promise becomes also a test of our methods even in our service to Him, for if we do not find anything but frustration, disappointment and endless fatigue in the service of Jesus, we need to ask ourselves whether we have really learned His method, share His Spirit and, hence, know His power and victory.

To call this **rest** merely spiritual, as opposed to physical rest, is a false dichotomy, since man is all of a piece and his spirit lives in a body. Both his spirit and his physical life are involved in his *psychē*, the word here translated **soul**. Jesus is offering rest for the whole man. This comes in two stages:

1. Upon simple faith in Jesus as we come to Him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (cf. 1 Co. 1:30, 31), we rest from the struggle to prove ourselves good enough to satisfy God. We rest from the harrassing guilt of our sins. Our distress and fears are mercifully eliminated as we commit ourselves to His grace. (Cf. Ro. 5:1; 8:1; 2 Ti. 1:12)
2. There is greater rest in bearing the yoke of Christ, in imitating Him and in becoming conformed to His image, for in so doing, we deny ourselves. The natural result of this is that that selfish clamor for attention and those conflicting desires that kept us constantly at war with ourselves are devaluated and gradually eliminated. Rest from self is rest from every other struggle with temptation. Why? Because we have settled our fundamental question of priorities as to which is most important: what the Father wills for us, or what we demand for self. Obedience to His will liberates us from the indecision and unrest of self-will. Submission to His yoke brings us real rest, since it is the joyous deference to a King whom we know and love as our Father. To obey rests us from the despotism of our desires, the liabilities of liberty and from the conflicts of conscience.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. This is an astounding claim! Jesus is saying that, after all is examined, His way alone is best: "Compare my demands upon your life, the discipline to which I call you, and its end results, with those required by any other discipline, and other yoke, any other world-

view, and you will find that my discipline, in the long run, is the easiest and the load I place upon you the lightest." Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 102) understands how the painfully exacting demands of Jesus can be considered "light and easy".

He did not mean to tell us that being a disciple of His is not exacting, nor that true righteousness is an easy task. . . . (But) so soon as religion becomes really possible, it becomes in a sense easy, for when it is genuine its very essence is liberating. . . . No meaningless rules in the school of Jesus. . . . The lessons are light because they are enlightening. They put you in the way of learning deepest truths and highest realities. Pupils—real students—never object to hard lessons; they glory in them. But they want their lessons to "have some sense to them", to lead somewhere, to hold clues to life's mysteries and nature's riddles. Any lesson that does that is easy, fascinating.

Easy yoke? Light burden? No hard work seems joyful at the moment, but what training for greater things it produces in those who have been disciplined by it! (Heb. 12:3-11) AFTER he turned himself over to Christ, Paul had more work to do than ever before, but what a difference in the prospects of accomplishment his new attachment to Christ made! Christ's yoke is easier, His burden lighter, not in the sense of less toil or difficulty, but in the sense of what is achieved for eternity. It is only the long-range view, which takes eternity into account, that permits one to see that His way really is best, though it be temporarily punctuated with crosses. (2 Co. 4:16-18; Heb. 12:2; 1 Jn. 5:3) Jesus has never lowered the standard of righteousness to make life easier for anyone. Rather, He actually raised the standard to absolute perfection. Despite this, the burden He places on our shoulders is actually lighter than any other we might choose, because He alters us. He alters our motives for bearing the load, thus giving us power to do it! W. M. Taylor (*PHC*, XXII 289) suggests that the yoke of Christ is easy:

1. Because our conscience approves of this burden.
2. Because love lightens our work, making us less conscious of a load that would otherwise be unendurable.
3. Because Jesus' own Spirit empowers us to bear it.
4. Because the longer we submit to His discipline, the easier it becomes. What at first required a great deal of effort becomes easy and more enjoyable with time.

5. Because we are encouraged by a valid, unshaken hope which has power to keep us steady under our discipline, where otherwise we would break and fall.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what sense does Matthew mean that "most" of Jesus' miracles were done in the area of the three Galilean cities?
2. Were there absolutely no converts made in these cities? Explain.
3. Locate the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin.
4. Locate the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, describing that part of Bible history regarding those cities that has bearing on Jesus' use of them as a basis of comparison.
5. Explain the cosmology involved in the expression "exalted to heaven" and "brought down to Hades". Is Hades "down" and heaven "up"? From what standpoint? If Jesus is really God, hence knows that the earth is spherical, then how can He conscientiously use these terms that are obviously oriented to a flat-earth concept? Or, does physics have anything to do with His basic meaning?
6. Define "Hades", giving its varying shades of meaning, and tell how Jesus uses it to describe the fate of unrepentant cities. Explain how cities can go down to Hades.
7. What other passages of Scripture show in what sense the expression "wise and understanding" is to be understood?
8. What other passages of Scripture help to explain what Jesus means by the term "babes"?
9. List the declarations in this section that reveal the divine nature and authority of Jesus.
10. Explain how God hides truth and, at the same time, reveals it. Do this by drawing your illustrations from the ministry and results of Jesus.
11. What is the full content of the expression: "All things" in the larger context of "All things have been given to me by my Father"?
12. When were "all things" given to Jesus? For how long were they to be His?
13. In what sense does Jesus mean that none really know Him?
14. In what sense does only Jesus know the Father?
15. What is the connection between Jesus' grand claims that He makes for Himself and His great invitation offered to all?
16. Explain the expressions "take my yoke upon you and learn of me" and "my burden is light". What is the *yoke* and the *burden*

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in this context? To what sphere of human endeavor do they refer when used by One who presents Himself to all as Teacher?

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ELEVEN "LOOKING FOR ANOTHER CHRIST"

Introduction: WHY look for another Christ? Because some are disappointed in the Christ given to us! This is not so surprising in light of the experiences of the people described in this chapter:

I. THE PERPLEXITY OF THE LOYAL-HEARTED (11:2-15)

A. John the Baptist: "If you are really the Messiah, how is it that the world goes on more or less as before, as if you had never come?"

1. This is the statement in other words of the problem of pain and evil: "Why does not God DO something about evil in the world, especially about the wicked themselves?"
2. It is similar to the question stabbing the conscience of our age: "If you are really the Church of the living God, if you really proclaim a Gospel of salvation and moral transformation that really works, why have you not done more to eliminate evil and initiate a practical demonstration of the rule and love of God on earth?" Our age just cannot ignore 2000 years of bad church history with its failures, corruptions and misrepresentations of Jesus.
3. As with all expressions of the problem of evil, these questions reveal an ignorance and a misapprehension of God's plans.
 - a. In the patient, merciful ministry of Jesus, God WAS doing a great deal about the injustices in the world.
 - b. Human intellect had failed to decipher the designs of God.
4. John's personal problem was the disproportional exaltation of Jesus' divine office as Judge, to the detriment of His merciful human ministry as the Son of man come to seek and save the lost.
 - a. The Law, Prophets and John had prepared Israel for the glorious coming of the King.

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- b. Jesus had come but apparently nothing was happening that would square with John's understanding of the coming Christ.
 - c. In desperation, John cries out: "Are you the coming One?"
5. But John's faith in the Lord brought him to no other source for answers to his dilemma.
- B. Jesus' answer: He appreciated the honest perplexity of His loyal prophet. He corrected His understanding and vindicated him completely. Notice the correction (11:6): "Tell John that although human intellect has failed to give him complete understanding of his problem, his intellect must submit to the wisdom of my methods and results. If his intellect judges my way not to be the best, it must see what I am accomplishing, even if it means turning his back upon his prejudices about what I should be doing. John must be content to say, 'God's methods are against my wisdom: I cannot understand why He does what He does, but I follow because HE leads me, for I have learned to trust Him.'"

II. THE FICKLENESS OF AN UNREASONABLE AGE (11:16-19)

- A. John had come protesting against the falsely-inspired merriment of his age.
- B. Jesus had come refusing to sorrow over the things that made men of His age mourn.
- C. Reaction of people in general: "If you are really the Holy One of God, why do you fraternize so familiarly with the rest of us? You are not saintly enough!"
 - 1. One reason for this reaction was the exaggeration of Jesus' divine character at the expense of His necessary and true humanity. Men thought that the great God would never so disturb Himself, so befoul Himself as to attend the banquet of a common sinner! Here again human intellect was at fault.
 - 2. Another reason is that human emotion is falsely stimulated. Men sought the inspiration of their joys and sorrows in the wrong places.
- D. Jesus' answer: "Human emotion must seek my inspiration, must learn to dance to my music, and mourn to my lamenta-

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tion. The age must discover that the only way into the Kingdom of God is that of beginning to rejoice where hitherto there had been no joy; to mourn where hitherto there had been no mourning. . . . Men must be done with dancing to the wrong music, with mourning over unimportant things."

- E. The Lord committed to the judgment of time that age dissatisfied with wisdom contrary to its fickle tastes and capricious emotions.

III. THE IMPENITENCE OF THE MOST FAVORED CITIES (11:20-24)

- A. Their reaction: "You cannot be taken too seriously as the voice of God. We plan to run our lives much as we have been doing it before you came along!"

1. Here is the depreciation of Jesus' divine authority and the demotion of the King to the level of any other human being.
2. Although these towns had personally witnessed Jesus' triumph over sin and its results that were causing the suffering in their midst, they did not recognize in His mastery a perpetual protest against their own sins. They remained rebels against God.
3. Here is the refusal of the will to submit to the control of God in Christ.

- B. Jesus' answer: "Your great opportunities make you so much more responsible before God for what you know, therefore your punishment for impenitence will be so much more severe! Change your mind about what I am teaching you: turn back upon your false concepts of the Kingdom of God and submit to His rule now!"

IV. THE FOLLY OF THE WISE AND THE WISDOM OF THE BABES (11:25-30)

- A. The wise and prudent reaction: "Any fool knows that yours is no way to establish a kingdom! Your program does not rhyme with any standard rabbinical formula of how the messianic kingdom has to be."

1. This is the refusal of human intellect to bow, acknowledging its own ignorance.

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2. The net result is the reduction of Jesus to less than a human prophet, for the wise see in this Nazarene something less than a sage whose advice should at least be considered.

B. The reason for this reaction is that God gives His greatest blessings only to the humble, but the human heart protests against the thought of starting all over again by being born again. People demand a religion that may be grasped as a prize for intellectual achievement; a religion that permits them to give full vent to their passions; a religion that grants them the dignity of their own self-will. But Christ demands that man surrender his darkened intellect, his vulgarized emotions and his prostituted will, so that he might begin again as a little child.

C. Who is a little child?

1. He is an ignorant man asking instruction.
2. He is an emotional person seeking proper inspiration.
3. He is a will searching for authority.
4. He is a weak one seeking power.
5. He is imperfect, but looking for perfection.
6. He trusts Jesus to lead him to find all this and more.

V. APPLICATION: How do people of our age look for another Christ?

A. By letting the disappointments and failures in our personal Christian life turn us aside from the Christ who actually came:

1. Do we have no assurance of forgiveness and relief from our guilt and sins?
2. Do we fail to find the joy and brightness we expected?
3. What kind of Christ did we expect? Does our *image* differ from the reality?

B. By letting the general condition of the world blind us to the real Christ and His purposes.

1. Jesus came to save the world and yet the larger portion of it not only remains unsaved but is also growing larger in proportion to the total population. How can He let this go on?

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2. If you look for another Christ, what kind of Messiah could alleviate the human predicament better than Jesus is now doing?
- C. We are not actually expecting the coming of another Christ that is not to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth, but the Jesus Christ whom we know will return in another form! (See Ac. 1:11; Phil. 3:20, 21)
1. When He comes, He will only seem to be another Christ different from the humble Galilean we once knew.
 - a. He will be a Christ whom most men had never believed in.
 - b. He will be a Christ whom most never expected to see come.
 - c. But He will be the very Christ whom John the Baptist said would come in blazing glory.
 2. But He will appear in His power and majesty to bring to a glorious conclusion the mission which He undertook in shame and weakness.
 - a. He has never changed His mission: it has ever been His intention to make righteousness to triumph over sin and get God's will done.
 - b. The same Jesus who was crucified in shame, raised in glory and now reigns at the Father's right hand, is even now perfecting His mission with an eye to that day when He will come for His saints.
- D. What then is to be our reaction?
1. We must ask ourselves, "Am I willing to admit my ignorance and ask instruction; am I willing to yield my emotional nature and take only His inspiration, dancing only to His piping, and mourning only to His lamentation; am I willing to take my will and submit it wholly to His authority; am I willing to take the place of unutterable weakness and depend upon His strength? Am I willing to confess my absolute and utter imperfection and give myself to Him for perfecting of all that concerns me?"
 2. "This is the passage from proud independence to simple confession of weakness. So men enter into this Kingdom. So men find their rest. . . . Our very pre-eminent re-

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spectability prevents the definite daring necessary to get into God's Kingdom. We are prone to drift upon easy seas, to admire the visions of the beautiful land, consent to the beauties of the great ideal, and never enter in because we will not . . . consent to yield to the claim of the King. . . ."

3. "Let this be the hour when you have done with your dilettante fooling with sacred things. Let this be the night when you translate your sickly anemic imagination into grip, force, go and determination."

(The above outline and some of its points were suggested by G. C. Morgan's sermon "The Kingdom By Violence" in *26 Sermons by Dr. G. Campbell Morgan*, Vol. II, p. 229ff.)

Another outline of this chapter might be:

"JESUS JUDGES HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND HIMSELF"

- I. John the Baptist (11:2-15): "More than a prophet!"
- II. His people in general (11:16-19): "Like children!"
- III. The most favored cities (11:20-24): "Damned!"
- IV. The simple disciples (11:25-30): "Learned!"
- V. Himself (11:20-30): "The Unique Hope of the Race!"

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ELEVEN

"REST IN A RESTLESS WORLD" (11:20-30)

Introduction: The newspapers of the world report riots that picture the great unrest of our world. In the great cities of the world every day is heard news of strikes, riots, protest movements, wars and famines. We wonder where this will all lead to or when it will end. Men's hearts faint for the fear and anxiety over the things that are coming over the world. And why should that be?

There is NO REST IN OUR RESTLESS WORLD, BECAUSE THERE IS NO CERTAINTY.

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1. One woman is uncertain, because another woman could take her husband away from her, and she is not sure that he would not like to go with the other woman!
2. The student is not sure that he can pass his exams, in order to find a small place in our society.
3. The worker can not be sure that tomorrow a machine will not take away his position and work for him.
4. The big industrialist can not be sure that he can hold his wealth.
5. The politicians can only try to establish a better government, but they can never be sure of the outcome.

In whatever other area we can discuss, there exists no rest-bringing security. We can certainly say that the one thing in our world that is certain, is our UNCERTAINTY! And our uncertainty troubles us!

But over the centuries we hear a mighty voice that says: "Come to me! I will give you rest!" In our dark world full of care and strife, difficulties and problems, anxieties and fear, these words bring us comfort, inspiration, encouragement and rest.

Let us listen to this voice from a bit closer by. What does Jesus mean to say to us?

I JESUS CONDEMNS THE UNBELIEVING BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT (11:20-24)

- A. Even though Jesus had fulfilled His commission in this world, yet His own people did not accept Him: they did not repent!
 1. Even though He had done His greatest miracles in their presence, miracles that established His message as God's personal revelation:
 2. Even though He had revealed God's will to them, yet they did not repent.
- B. There was no one more joyfully seen, heard and received than Jesus of Nazareth!
 1. They were all ready to make Him their King and establish a worldly messianic kingdom.
 2. They were willing to risk everything to follow Him, rising up against the Roman government, against the hypocritical religion of the Pharisees and chief priests, against all political authority.
 3. They wanted to have a King who could give them bread,

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miracles and wealth, a place among the greatest empires of the world!

4. They wanted the SECURITY, that could come through His miraculous power. They wanted His providence and protection, His conquest of all enemies and His divine defence. They wanted to have all this, while THEY REMAINED UNCHANGED IN HEART AND LIFE.

C. But Jesus sees that they have not understood Him:

1. He had called them to repentance; they wanted to make Him their servant.
2. He wanted to put God in them; they wanted Him and God in THEIR service.
3. Jesus' heart is broken over their deep need of repentance and over their unwillingness to repent.
4. Jesus has so strenuously, so faithfully, so unselfishly, so carefully tried to give them God! And they have neither seen it nor understood!

D. Is this not a picture of our world?

1. We want God on OUR conditions: all His blessings, all His goodness, but He does not dare demand our repentance nor our obedience!
2. Jesus wants to bring us to reality and truth; He wants to create God in us; He wants to put real rest and peace in our heart, but UNDER HIS CONDITIONS: "I tell you, unless you all likewise repent, you shall all likewise perish!"
3. But to whom did Jesus say that?
 - a. To people that thought that simply to be in the vicinity of Jesus was the same thing as faith and repentance.
 - b. To people who thought that common goodness was the same as deep-felt repentance:
 - (1) These were more or less better people than those of Sodom, Tyre and Sidon.
 - (2) But Jesus did not want to make people *more or less* good, but just as perfect as God Himself! (Mt. 5:48)
 - c. To people who thought that culture and enlightenment were sufficient to enjoy the better life.

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- (1) They had had the best enlightenment, because they could hear the Truth itself and revelation of God's will, preached by Jesus Himself!
 - (2) But the light against which we sin, will be the measure whereby we will be judged!
 - (3) The greatness of the quantity of information that we have received concerning God's truth, does not release us from the responsibility to repent and trust Jesus!
- d. To people who thought that to do nothing was as sufficient as repenting. Their sin was the sin of refusing to take a positive stand for Jesus Christ!
- (1) How many people today exalt Jesus as a Superman, "a Man born before His time", perhaps a great Prophet, yes, even as God's Son?
 - (2) And yet they do nothing with Him! They take no responsibility for what they know about Jesus of Nazareth!
4. So why does our world have unrest, insecurity, desperation?
BECAUSE WE WILL NOT TRUST JESUS AND REPENT!

Let us listen further to His words:

II JESUS LAYS DOWN HIS OWN CONDITIONS, WHEREBY WE CAN RECEIVE GOD'S TRUST AND REST. (11:25, 26)

Even though He gives us conditions that are absolutely necessary to which we must render whole-hearted and immediate obedience, yet He gives us also His own personal example how we should understand the conditions He requires. What does He do?

- A. He thanks God and rejoices with the Father over the method whereby God chose to reveal His will. This is the grateful acceptance of the will and plans of His Father.
1. Even though He could not reach the unrepentant people and cities, after thousands of attempts, yet He gives God thanks that God had used this method to reveal Himself and that it was God's idea.
 2. Even though there were a very few simple people that truly accepted Jesus, yet Jesus THANKS the Father for them.
 3. Jesus recognizes the universal Lordship of His Father. This

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too is an anchor for our souls, if we acknowledge that there is no place in this universe, no problem in our world over which our God is not fully Master and fully in charge!

4. Jesus praised and thanked God that His plan *really works* to save those people who *can be* taught.

B. But what is God's method to save the world? By revealing these eternal truths to humble seekers, to "little children."

1. Who are "the wise and understanding" of this world, from whom God has hidden His will? These are the people who are "wise" in their own eyes and proud of their own understanding.

—So far as the world could see it was Pilate who was a greater man than Peter, but Jesus could do much more with a Peter than with Pilate!

—The high priest Caiaphas went far higher in the human society than Matthew, but that publican could become an Apostle for eternity, because he could forsake everything to follow Jesus!

2. Who are the "little children", to whom God has given great revelations of His will? These are the humble people who open their lives to follow Jesus' leadership and accept His teaching.

a. The doors of God's Kingdom remain open for those who repent and become little children.

b. These are the people who admit their ignorance, confess their sins and come to Jesus for forgiveness. (I Cor. 1:18-31)

3. Yes, this is God's plan and Jesus thanks Him for it.

III JESUS ACCEPTS THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE AND PRESENTS HIMSELF AS THE ONLY POSSIBLE REVEALER OF GOD (11:27)

A. "All things have been committed to me by my Father."

1. Perhaps we are caused to think immediately of the glory and royalty of God's Son, because we know that, at the end of the world, everything will be the inheritance of Jesus.

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2. But here Jesus is not speaking about the glory and wealth that shall be His.
3. He understands very clearly that the weight of the sins of the whole world have been laid upon HIM!
 - a. There is no arrogance here, but an honest bending of the Lord Jesus Himself to take upon Himself the gigantic weight of a lost mankind upon Himself.
 - b. He had just seen people, that had had the best possible opportunity to be saved, refuse the call of God.
 - c. Perhaps He is reminded of the ancient words of Isaiah:
"All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned every one to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
(53:6)
Our own unwillingness to repent was laid upon God's Son!
 - d. Yes, "the government will be upon his shoulder", but the insignia thereof are not the colorful flags and marching eagles of a great empire, but the bleeding "stripes by which we are healed"!
4. Yes, all things have been committed to Jesus by His Father: the moral responsibility for all men *just like they are*: in their sins, their dying and in their deep need for repentance and redemption!
This is why we are not surprised about what Jesus says next:
 - B. "No one knows the Son but the Father!"
 1. Here is a cry that comes out of the loneliness of the Lord Jesus.
 - a. There is no man on earth that realizes the greatness of the burden of the Son of God.
 - b. Jesus has not found anyone who really understands how He feels among sinners, nor shares His burden.
 2. Jesus has had thousands of followers, but very few of them continued to follow Him, even though those few themselves were deeply unaware of His mission, His purpose, and His Person. Even so late as the last week of His life, before going to the cross, Jesus had to say to them,

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"Have I been so long with you, and you do not yet know me?"

3. Jesus feels deeply His loneliness on earth: no one really knows or understands Him.
 - a. But people must understand Him in order to be saved!
 - b. But we must understand His message, in order thereby to be able to know the Father.

C. "No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

1. Jesus finds Himself in a world where no one really knows God!
 - a. This means that all the great inventors of religion are liars, if they contradict, diminish or deny the Word of Jesus!
 - b. This means that all the lesser religious lights who have led men away from God's Will are "thieves and robbers"! (Jn. 10:1)

2. This is a world, in Jesus' day and in our own as well, wherein people have lost the very key to life, because they live as if God does not exist. But Jesus knows that God is the central fact of all reality, the greatest, most important fact of all.

3. Jesus prayed: "This is eternal life, that men might know you, the only true God, AND JESUS CHRIST, whom you have sent!" (Jn. 17:3)

4. Only JESUS knew God. Here Jesus expressed the longing to make God known to men.

5. He MUST make God known, but how can He go about the task of revealing God?

D. Here is His method whereby He reveals the Father.

IV. JESUS INVITES HUMBLE DISCIPLES TO COME TO HIM AND LEARN (11:28-30)

A. This young Jew, not more than 33 years old, invites the entire human race to come to Him to learn. He promises that every one, however great his problems might be, shall find rest for his soul! Let the stupendous nature of this invitation sink deep into your heart: feel the gigantic nature of the fraud if

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- the claims implicit in this invitation are false. Feel the power of God's loving mercy, if these claims are true! Here we must decide what we think about Jesus!
- B. But Jesus has to be the teacher, if we are to find rest for our souls. The only ones whom Jesus can help are the "little children". We must be willing to learn EVERYTHING from Him.
1. Jesus has already had too many theologians and professors, who molded His ideas according to their own conceptions! He wants *disciples*, or followers, who are willing to follow Him and live under His discipline. The so-called "great" preachers, professors, priests, bishops, popes, councils, theologians and universities are not what Jesus is looking for! He seeks men and women, boys and girls who are willing to enroll themselves in His school and learn under HIM.
- C. Even though Jesus Himself is the Revealer of the eternal God, even though He Himself is the Creator of heaven and earth, even though He is the Judge before whom all must give account, yet He is gentle and lowly in heart.
1. He is not a teacher that His students need to be afraid of.
 2. He does not boss His students around; they do not need to be afraid to expose their ignorance before Him.
 3. My friend, He could become your Teacher: with Jesus you need fear no ridicule or contempt in His school.
 4. If you are an eager student, you will find Jesus ready to help you, sharing with you the same spirit of joy in knowledge. He will help you at whatever level you find yourself, in order to bring you up to His level of full knowledge of the entire universe! You will find Him a wise and sympathetic Teacher, who will lead you into truth.
 5. How many times has Jesus already shown Himself this kind of Teacher? How many times did the sinners and publicans come to Jesus, even though they had run away from the proud, strict Pharisees? They knew that Jesus was different, so, friend, do not put Jesus in the same class with religious leaders that you know, because He is not at all like any teacher you ever knew. He is in a class all by Himself, but you will enjoy enrolling in the class!

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6. The publicans and sinners of Jesus' day felt the attraction of His gentleness, and they knew that He could help free them from sins that they had for years taken for granted.
- D. In Jesus' school you find SECURITY and rest for your soul!
1. To the tired worker, Jesus gives genuine rest for the body, nerves and mind, because Jesus gives true rest for his SPIRIT. Such a person can now sleep, because he has a forgiven conscience.
 2. To the tired and heavy-laden worshipper, Jesus gives rest also.
 - a. Tired of religious ceremonies, duties, norms and empty forms? Then, Jesus offers you devotion to a Person.
 - b. Tired of defeats and disappointments in the struggle against sin? Then Jesus gives you the refreshment of forgiveness and power to overcome.
 3. To the tired worldly who has found everything to be futile and empty, Jesus offers His fullness, all His friendship and companionship.

INVITATION: Friend, you know your own cares, your own sins, and problems. Let Jesus take your difficulties and free you. Lay all your difficulties down at the feet of Jesus. Enroll yourself in His school; He invites you now.

CHAPTER TWELVE

- Section 26. Jesus Faces Charges of Sabbath Breaking (12:1-14)
Section 27. Jesus the Healing Servant of Jehovah (12:15-21)
Section 28. Jesus Is Attacked For Casting Out Demons and Charged With League With Satan (12:22-37)
Section 29. Jesus Gives the Sign of Jonah and Condemns His Generation (12:38-45)
Section 30. Jesus Refuses to Permit Fleshly Ties to Bind Him (12:46-50)

STUDY OUTLINES

- I. JESUS FACES CHARGES OF SABBATH BREAKING (12:1-14)
 - A. For permitting "grain threshing" on the Sabbath (12:18)

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ANSWERS:

1. Human need rises above strict legal procedure. (12:3, 4)
 2. Work in God's service is permitted on the Sabbath. (12:5, 6)
 3. God's interpretation of law is much more lenient than yours (12:7)
 4. I am Lord of the Sabbath. (12:8)
- B. For healing man's withered hand in synagogue on Sabbath. (12:9-15a)
1. To refuse to do good or save life is to do harm or destroy. (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9)
 2. You work by helping dumb beast. Why not help man who is worth so much more to God? (12:11, 12a)
 3. Doing good is legal! (12:12b)
 4. Jesus established His correct conclusion by the miracle of healing the man's hand. (12:13)
 5. The Pharisees immediately held counsel with the Herodians discussing how to destroy Jesus. (12:14)

II. JESUS THE HEALING SERVANT OF JEHOVAH (12:15-21)

- A. Situation: Jesus strategically withdrew from immediate hostility of the religious leaders. Common people followed Him from many areas, seeking healing. Jesus healed them, ordering strict secrecy.
- B. Result: Fulfilment of Isaiah 42:1ff.
1. His Nature (12:18a)
 2. His Authority and Task (12:18b)
 3. His Method (12:19)
 4. His Results (12:20)
 5. His Universality (12:21)

III. JESUS IS ATTACKED FOR CASTING OUT DEMONS AND CHARGED WITH LEAGUE WITH SATAN (12:22-37)

- A. SITUATION: He healed a blind, dumb demoniac, which resulted in the crowds' asking, "Is He the Messiah?" Jealous Pharisees counterattack by asserting Jesus works by devil's power.

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B. JESUS' BASIC REBUTTAL:

1. Satan is divided: good! (12:25, 26)
2. What about your students who exorcize demons? (12:27)
3. Reasonable alternative: God's Spirit empowers me. (12:28)
4. More evidence: in order to overpower the devil, one must be stronger than Satan! (12:29)
5. Neutrality is impossible. (12:30)

C. JESUS EXPLAINS HIS WARNING AGAINST BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (12:31, 32; cf. Lk. 12:8-10; Mk. 3:28-30)

1. All sins will be forgivable, except that by which all knowledge of God's truth and forgiveness is received, i.e. by His Spirit.
2. Eternal damnation awaits the sinner who rejects all that is the Spirit's work among men.

D. TALK IS NOT CHEAP (12:33-37)

1. Speech reveals one's sense of moral discernment. (12:33-35)
2. There are no words that do not count, for God holds us accountable for all. (12:36, 37)

IV. JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH AND CONDEMNS HIS GENERATION (12:38-45)

A. Unreasonable request for a sign of Jesus' identity and authority. (38)

B. Jesus' logical refusal: "It is unfaithfulness to God to ask for more signs than those already given!" (12:39)

C. Jesus' merciful exception: the resurrection is His last sign. (12:40)

D. Jesus' condemnation well-grounded. (12:41, 42)

1. Illustration: Ninevites heard only the prophet Jonah.
2. Illustration: Queen of the South heard only Solomon.
3. Implicit Conclusion: According to the light against which you have sinned will be your judgment. You have had greater opportunities to know God's will.

E. Warning: "Your religion has made you empty, leaving you a spiritual vacuum for anything that will fill it up."

V. JESUS REFUSES TO PERMIT FLESHLY TIES TO BIND HIM (12:46-50)

Section 26

JESUS ANSWERS CHARGES OF
SABBATH BREAKING

(Parallels: Mark 2:23—3:6; Luke 6:1-11)

TEXT: 12:1-14

I. SUSPICION

1. At that season Jesus went on the sabbath day through the grain-fields; and his disciples were hungry and began to pluck ears and to eat.
2. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which it is not lawful to do upon the sabbath.
3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they that were with him;
4. how he entered into the house of God, and ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?
5. Or have ye not read in the law, that on the sabbath day the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless?
6. But I say unto you, that one greater than the temple is here.
7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.
8. For the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath.

II. INVESTIGATION

9. And he departed thence, and went into their synagogue:
10. and behold, a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day, that they might accuse him.
11. And he said unto them, What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?
12. How much then is a man of more value than a sheep! Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.
13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, as the other.

III. DETERMINATION

14. But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How did their conduct sanction His healing of the man?
- b. How does Jesus change, in verse 12, their question of verse 10, in order to bring out the underlying principle on which He justified His conduct?
- c. In what ways have some individuals indicated that they regard animals more than they do man?
- d. Could it be that MAN, for whom the sabbath under the law was made and not vice versa, is also the lord of the Sabbath in the sense that he is to use it for his own rest and for God's glory? Certainly, Jesus was the unique "Lord of the Sabbath" in a particular sense. But is not man also the "lord of the sabbath" in his freedom to decide what good deeds of mercy or necessity he shall perform?
- e. Why do you think Jesus brought "saving lives or killing" into His argument with the Pharisees? (Mk. 3:4) What is the connection?
- f. Why was Jesus so angry with those Pharisees? (Mk. 3:5)
- g. Why did these respected religious leaders wish to destroy this young Rabbi from Nazareth?
- h. Why did they call the Herodians into their discussions about how they might do away with Jesus? How could the Herodians help? (Mk. 3:6)
- i. What was the advantage to be gained for Jesus by calling the man with the shrivelled hand forward before healing him? (Lk. 6:8)
- j. What difference do you see in the way Jesus went about His work and the way the Pharisees operated?
- k. Why do you think Jesus kept going into the synagogues, even though He could probably foresee the difficulties and opposition He would meet there?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

One sabbath while Jesus and His disciples were walking through grainfields, His disciples, feeling hungry, began to pluck some of the heads of grain, rub off the husks in their hands and eat. But when some of the Pharisees noticed it, they remarked to Jesus, "Look! why are you and your disciples doing what is forbidden on the sabbath?"

Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David and his men did when they were in need and hungry—how he entered into the house of God (when Abiathar was high priest), took and ate the consecrated bread of the presence, though they did not have the right to eat? Only the priests can eat it. And he even gave it to those who were with him.

"Or have you not read in the law how the priests working in the temple on the sabbath profane the sabbath without guilt? I tell you, something more important than the temple is here.

"And if you had grasped the meaning of this scripture (Hosea 6:6)—'I desire mercy and not merely sacrifices'—you would not have condemned the innocent. The sabbath was made for man's benefit, not man for the sabbath. This is why the Son of man is even lord of the sabbath."

He went on from that place and on another sabbath He entered their synagogue and taught. Now there was a man present whose right hand was shrivelled or wasted away. The legal experts and Pharisees watched Him closely to see whether He would heal him on the sabbath.

Then they quizzed Him, "Is it right to heal anyone on the sabbath?" so that they might find an accusation to use against Him.

But He, knowing their motives, spoke to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here and stand in the midst of the group." The man rose and stood there. Then Jesus addressed the others, "Now, I put the question to you, Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or harm, to have life or destroy it?"

But they were silent.

Then He posed another question, "Suppose that you had one sheep which fell into a pit on the sabbath, would you not get hold of it and lift it out? How much more precious is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath!" He looked around on them all with anger, deeply hurt at their inhumanity and hardness of heart. Turning to the man, He spoke, "Stretch out your hand." When he did so it was restored as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees, filled with insane fury, went out and held counsel against Jesus, discussing with one another and with the Herodians what they might do to Jesus to destroy Him.

NOTES

- I. JESUS FACES CHARGES OF SABBATH BREAKING (12:1-14)
- A. FOR PERMITTING GRAIN THRESHING ON THE SABBATH (12:1-8)

1. THE SITUATION (12:1)

12:1 **At that time** can be rather easily identified due to the maturity of the standing grain which the disciples are eating: the time is sometime in the Spring of 27 A.D., shortly after the second Passover of Jesus' ministry. (Cf. Jn. 5) Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, II, 439) note that "in the warmer parts of Palestine the barley ripens about the middle of April and is reaped in April or the beginning of May, whereas the wheat ripens two or three weeks later."

His disciples were hungry. Herein lies the rightness of what they did: God had not only instituted the Sabbath for man's blessing, but He had also made men to be hungry. The desire for food is not somehow secular, as opposed to sacred, merely because it has to do with this body and this life. Otherwise, would not God have dispensed with human hunger on the Sabbath, so they would have been able to serve Him without distraction? No, human hunger is no more sinful or secular than a thousand other human activities which divine revelation clearly limits to this age, this life. (Cf. Mt. 22:30, marriage; eating and drinking, I Tim. 4:3-5; 1 Co. 6:13) So, all other things being equal, even the human hunger of Jesus' disciples was part of God's plan for man, just as much as it was His intention that they rest sufficiently in body and soul by proper Sabbath observance. Even the simple confession "I am hungry", means "God has made me this way and I am just feeling experientially and personally this part of His good government of my human existence." But, of course, what is involved here is essential human need, not the responding to a mere desire unprompted by essential necessity.

They began to pluck ears of grain and to eat, "rubbing them in their hands" (Luke). Apparently, Jesus used none of His miraculous power to provide necessary daily food either for Himself or His men. (Cf. Mt. 21:18, 19=Mk. 11:12, 13) The arrogance of the Pharisees to make such a charge (12:2) becomes the more painfully apparent when it is remembered that the Sabbath was not observed by the Hebrews, even the Pharisees, with rigorous austerity. They even turned the day into one of feasting and entertainment of guests. (Cf. Lk. 14:1-6 and Plutarch, *Symp.* iv. 6, cited by Trench, *Miracles*, 207: "The Hebrews honor the Sabbath chiefly by inviting each other to drinking and intoxication.") By contrast, Jesus' men had to settle for what they could find to fill their empty stomachs.

Moses' Law expressly permits this action on any day of the week. (Dt. 23:24, 25) And all the Gospel writers make it precisely clear that what the disciples did was done while they were on the move,

going through the fields of standing grain. So the issue here is not theft, but merely what the objectors regard to be work done on the Sabbath. (Cf. the attitude of the synagogue's ruler, Lk. 13:14. Note *ergázesthai*.) Presumably, the disciples offended the rabbinic interpretation of "work" on several counts, since not only did they pluck the heads of grain (which legalistically could be called "harvesting"), but they also rubbed them in their hands (*psōchontes tās chersin* could be described by the nitpickers as "threshing"), and if they blew the husks out of their hands before eating, they could be accused of "winnowing"! (Cf. Lk. 6:1) Worse still, by this whole series of acts they could also be accused of preparing a meal on the Sabbath, whereas Sabbath food should have been readied the day before!

Morgan (*Matthew*, 125) points up the stark contrast between all this Jewish legalism and the personal mentality of the Apostles:

It was a perfectly simple and natural action of the disciples, and reveals very clearly their estimate of their Lord's heart. They did not for a moment imagine that He would rebuke them. They knew, as members of the Hebrew nation, that they were doing things that the Pharisees would object to, but they were with Him, and familiarity with Him, and a consciousness of His attitude towards the Sabbath, set them free to pluck the ears. . . . It is a revelation of the relationship existing between the Christ and His disciples. There was no hesitation, no appeal, no fear.

Or, if there had been any of this timidness, especially with Pharisees prowling in the vicinity, Jesus had allayed their fears, even if He Himself did not choose to satisfy His own hunger in the same way. (The Pharisees do not attack His own eating, but that of His disciples.)

2. THE PHARISEES' REACTION (12:2)

12:2 **But when the Pharisees saw it.** Though these may not be identical with those earlier critics (Mt. 9:2-8; Lk. 5:17), nevertheless their attitude is precisely the same and so illustrative of the zeal of the heresy-hunters. (Cf. Ac. 14:19; 17:13; Gal. 2:12) It is a revealing trait of these (and perhaps all) hypocrites that they lay great stress on the external forms and ceremonies of religion while standing quite mute before the pleas of the deeper, more real demands of justice, mercy and faith. Is it possible, then, to judge the shallowness and irrelevance of a man's religion by the amount of undue stress he lays upon such externals?

They said to him, Look. These hard-nosed legalists seem to have regularly sought opportunities to jump on anyone who did not respect their traditional view of Sabbath observance. (Cf. Jn. 5:10) **Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath,** or, as Mark and Luke put it, "Why do your disciples do (it)?" This question provided what seemed to these inquisitors to be the perfect trap:

1. Either the Nazarene must accept the Pharisees' premise that the disciples' actions truly violated the Sabbath and, therefore, He must condemn His own followers, thereby alienating them. This, because, for better or worse, He had taught them. Thus He would be shown up as knowing little better Himself! The disciples' actions clearly reflected His tacit approval of this freedom from the traditional, but obligatory requirements of the rabbis.
2. Or He must publicly repudiate the Pharisees' premise that the disciples' actions violated the Sabbath, in which case He would expose both Himself and His followers as transgressors of the Law. By defending their transgression, He becomes in spirit Himself a transgressor. In that event, though He would have defended His followers, they would still have defected, since, insofar as they shared the basic viewpoint of the Pharisees, He would have damned Himself in their eyes.

Either way, it represented a triumph for the enemy. Either way, they have Him trapped. In either case, He stands to lose disciples and His popularity will be broken, for He would have committed Himself to the wrong side of a vital issue on which no self-respecting Hebrew could afford to be wrong, namely about the Sabbath.

This appears to be a beautiful dilemma on which to crucify Jesus, but the trouble with it, as well as with any other false choice, is that the fundamental proposition upon which the dilemma is constructed is false. The Pharisees could not dream that their own interpretations of the Sabbath law were of no where near the same validity as the Sabbath law itself. They had no conception of the possibility that they themselves, in their very attempt to interpret carefully the Sabbath law, had in fact become violators of its spirit and intent. The simplest method of eliminating the dilemma facing Jesus was to show that, while He took the Sabbath law seriously and taught His disciples likewise, what the disciples were actually doing was no profanation of God's original intent. Thus He destroyed the false proposition

upon which the Pharisees' dilemma is constructed, i.e. "Our understanding of the proper observance of the Sabbath is the only view possible." But before showing the proper, original intent of the Sabbath, He needed to draw their attention to the exceptions to strict interpretation of law which even the Pharisees themselves both admitted and justified.

But the Pharisees were so sure that they had found Jesus in flagrant violation of fundamental Mosaic Law because of their exaggerated stress on the Sabbath. The surprisingly high number of clashes between Jesus and His opponents that turned upon this one point is explicable in view of the superstitiously high regard with which the Jews held the Sabbath. Farrar (*Life*, 329) summarizes their feelings:

The Sabbath was a Mosaic, nay, even a primeval institution, and it had become the most distinctive and the most passionately revered of all the ordinances which separated Jew from Gentile as a peculiar people. It was at once the sign of their exclusive privileges, and the center of their barren formalism. Their traditions, their patriotism, even their obstinacy, were all enlisted in its scrupulous maintenance. Not only had it been observed in heaven before man was, but they declared that the people of Israel had been chosen for the sole purpose of keeping it. . . . Their devotion to it was only deepened by the universal ridicule, inconvenience, and loss which it entailed upon them in the heathen world. They were even proud that, from having observed it with a stolid literalism, they had suffered themselves on that day to lose battles, to be cut to pieces by their enemies, to see Jerusalem itself imperilled and captured. Its observance had been fenced round by the minutest, the most painfully precise, the most ludicrously insignificant restrictions . . .

Other religions had their sacred temples, holy cities, priests, sacrifices and festal assemblies, but to the Jews alone was the Sabbath given as the peculiar sign of their exclusive belonging to God. The sanctity with which Jews regarded the Sabbath may the more easily be gauged by the intensity and deadly seriousness with which they objected to Jesus' claims, teaching and practice regarding it. The importance of the issue may also be weighed by the unrelenting determination of Jesus to make His point, even though, for Him, death rode with the outcome. And the almost delighted conclusion of these heresy-hunters that what His disciples were doing with His obvious sanction was

"not lawful on the sabbath," was prompted by, and explicable on the basis of the fact that this act rendered them strictly liable to death by stoning according to the ancient mosaic precedent. (Cf. Nu. 15:32, 33)

Not lawful on the sabbath. What the disciples were doing was clearly a breach of rabbinic traditions, but not of the Biblical law, so the charge of the Pharisees is false. The original commandment given by God forbade work. (Study Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:2, 3; Lev. 23:3; Nu. 15:32-36; Dt. 5:12-17)

THE SABBATH LAW

- I. Who must observe it? (Ex. 20:9)
 - A. The Hebrew and his family
 - B. The Hebrew's servants
 - C. The Hebrew's animals
 - D. Any sojourners in Hebrew cities

- II. Why must they observe it? (Ex. 20:11; 31:15)
 - A. Because God rested on the seventh day
 - B. Because God blessed the seventh day
 - C. Because God hallowed the seventh day as "a sabbath unto Jehovah," making it thus "holy unto Jehovah."
 - D. The Sabbath is a special "sign between God and Israel (Ex. 31:13)
 - E. The Sabbath is a perpetual agreement between God and Israel (Ex. 31:16)
 - F. Penalty for profanation by working was to be death (Ex. 31:14, 15; 35:2)
 - G. In order that servants may rest as well as the Hebrews themselves (Dt. 5:14)

- III. How must they observe it?
 - A. Negatively: what must not be done on the Sabbath?
 1. The Hebrew must do no work; work must be done on the other six days (Ex. 20:9, 10)
 2. No plowing or harvesting (Ex. 34:21)
 3. No kindling of a fire in the homes (Ex. 35:3; Num. 15:32-36?)
 4. No baking or boiling food (Ex. 16:23)
 5. No treading the winepress (Neh. 13:15)
 6. No hauling of goods or food to markets (Neh. 13:15)
 7. No carrying on of trade (Neh. 13:16; Amos 8:5)
 - B. Positively: what could be done on the Sabbath?

1. The Hebrew must rest (Ex. 34:21) a "solemn rest" (Ex. 35:2)
2. Holy convocations (Lev. 23:3) Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, II, 439) comment:

Moreover Knobel is wrong in identifying the 'holy convocation' with a journey to the sanctuary, whereas appearance at the tabernacle to hold the holy convocations (for worship) was not regarded as necessary either in the law itself or according to the latter orthodox custom, but, on the contrary, holy meetings for edification were held on the Sabbath in every place in the land, and it was out of this that the synagogues arose. (Cf. 2 Kg. 4:22, 23)

On this latter verse, they comment (*Kings*, 311):

From these words . . . others have drawn the correct conclusion that the pious in Israel were accustomed to meet together at the prophets' houses for worship and edification, on those which were appointed in the law (Lev. 23:3; Num. 18:11sq.) for the worship of God . . .

Cf. also Ezek. 46:3

3. Sabbath offerings in the Temple:
 - a. The regular, continual burnt-offering with its relative drink-offering (Nu. 28:1-8)
 - b. Additional, special Sabbath offerings of two male lambs with the relative libation (Nu. 28:9)

This hasty sketch of the Sabbath law mirrors a true impression of the absolute simplicity of the Sabbath ordinance. After all, God did not wish to burden His people with a multitude of regulations and so defeat the very purpose of the Sabbath by making it a burden. But, ironically, the interpreters of the Law were not satisfied with so simple a prohibition. "Work" must be defined so carefully as to eliminate any equivocation. With these definitions came a multiplicity of other rules, all intended to clarify God's will. What a travesty on piety to presume to be able to state God's will more clearly than He was able to do it Himself! But the orthodox took all these minute regulations with intense seriousness. For them, to keep these traditional definitions was to keep God's Law. To neglect or disregard them was to defy God! But when will the Church of Jesus Christ learn the lesson

that such a slavish adherence to the letter of Scripture, the more precise it is, usually produces only a wider departure from its spirit?

3. JESUS ANSWERS:

a. *Human need rises above strict, legal procedure* (12:3, 4)

There are times when it is proper to ignore the opposition, to let it die frustrated by its own weakness, fall of its own weight. But the Lord sees that this is not the time. This is the moment when He must do battle or surrender His cause. In the skirmishes that ensue He feels absolutely impelled to return the fire of the Pharisees, but He does so much more than this. He teaches us how to understand and apply the specific terminology of God's law as it applies to us. He reveals Himself as lord even of the Sabbath. He places the proper emphasis on real human need, as opposed to inhumane application of God's will which had originally been intended for man's good.

Whereas the critics' original objection had been levelled at the disciples' actions, everyone knew that Jesus, not the disciples, was really on trial. This explains why Jesus leaped to meet the attack. There is no apology here; rather He accepts full responsibility for what His men had done and justified them completely (See on 12:5).

12:3 **Have you not read?** Mark's rendering (2:25) is more brusque: "Have you never read. . . ?" (*oudépote anégnote*) However, Jesus expected a positive answer, as demonstrated by the form in which He framed the question (negative *ou*). Of course, they had read the cited Scripture many times, but had been blinded to its significance. This is a stinging rebuke for ignorance of Scripture when asked of those who pretended to be its official interpreters. The Lord used this approach effectively several times. (Cf. Mt. 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31) Even on this occasion He hammers on the inexcusable ignorance of the Scriptures, driving home their inability to grasp the real meaning of their own sacred texts. His argument rises with smashing force by means of two questions: "Have you not read? . . . Have you not read in the law?" (12:3, 5) until He clenches His conclusion with "If you had known what this means (Hos. 6:6), you would not have condemned the innocent." (12:7)

What David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him. The incident cited (1 Sam. 21:1-6) becomes also Jesus' vindication of the historicity of the facts narrated there, since it is inconceivable that Jesus should deceive men by making use of facts merely supposed to be true, but which He Himself knew to belong rather to the unfounded or otherwise unprovable traditions

of His people. Mark (2:26) reports David's act as taking place "in the days of Abiathar the high priest," whereas his father Ahimelech held that office until his murder by Saul. (Cf. 1 Sam. 21:1—22:21; 23:6) Thus, David asked bread, not of Abiathar but of Ahimelek. The solutions that have been offered to these apparently contradictory facts are:

1. There was a slip of the memory either on the part of Jesus or Mark, i.e. Mark forgot what Jesus actually said when He mentioned the right name, or worse still, Jesus momentarily misremembered the proper name and confounded father and son. But either of the suggestions is inadequate in light not only of the inspiration of Mark and the undoubted authority and infallibility of Jesus, but also in light of better arguments that harmonize the same facts more suitably, without requiring the disqualifying of either Jesus or Mark.
2. Jesus was speaking by prolepsis. Whereas Abiathar's high priesthood did not begin until later, yet, because he, through his association with David, became so much more famous than his father, is described by this later title by prolepsis. Note that Mark says no more than *epi Abiathar archierēs*, which may mean no more than "in the time of Abiathar the high priest", and so not exclusively specifically, "when Abiathar was high priest", as the RSV renders the phrase. (For uses of *epi* with genitive to denote time, see Arndt and Gingrich, 286, I, 2)
3. Abiathar may have already been priest during the high priesthood of his father, carrying out some priestly functions. But even if he had nothing to do with the high priesthood *per se*, he actually became high priest only a few days after David's visit to his father Ahimelek, whose help to David cost him his life and whose death automatically made his only surviving son the next high priest. So the high priesthood of Abiathar was only a matter of hours after his father fed David and his men, and so may loosely be described centuries after the event as high priest, as he was thereafter known.

13:4 **how he entered the house of God**, not the Temple but the tabernacle pitched at Nob, apparently not at Shiloh. (Cf. 1 Sam. 21:1; 22:9, 10, 11, 19) **And ate the bread of the Presence.** (Cf. Ex. 25:30; Lev. 24:5-9) **Which it was not lawful for him to eat . . . but only for the priests.** On this point the law is

clear: "It shall be for Aaron and his sons; and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy unto him of the offerings . . ." (Lev. 24:9) But what is the precise thrust of Jesus' argument? Does He justify David's course, or does He merely argue as He does because He knows the Pharisees justify David?

1. If this is a mere *argumentum ad hominem* based upon the fact that the Pharisees excused David for eating the holy bread, then His argument goes no further, since it would be valid only against those who mistakenly justified such a violation of the law of which David thus becomes guilty. But that Jesus Himself also justified David is evident from the fact that God also, in a sense, justified David and Ahimelek by not immediately smiting them for this "violation of strict Levitical practice". (Did God always punish violations of ceremonial or moral law immediately upon commission of the sin as He sometimes did?) Further, were there any hint that Jesus really condemned David's action, His opponents could have pounced upon it as a weapon against Him, since He had placed the actions of His disciples in the same position with David's, and if they had sensed that He held David to be culpable, they could have accused His disciples of the same.
2. Or, on the other hand, does Jesus justify David's actions, thus share the same fundamental proposition with the Pharisees while using it to show their inconsistency? If so, one must interpret Jesus' statement: **the bread . . . which it was not lawful for him to eat.** How can some action be justifiable and still be **not lawful**?
 - a. According to a strictly literal interpretation of the particular code in question, that bread was for none but priests only. There was a general prohibition specifically stated in the Levitical text that forbade the sharing of the bread of the Presence with laymen like David. (Lev. 22:10-16; cf. also Ex. 29:33; Lev. 10:12-15) The presentation bread was not merely the priests' food, because it was a consecrated sacrifice. (Lev. 24:9)
 - b. However, David's actions were in perfect harmony with good Scripture interpretation. Were Ahimelek and David wrong to interpret the Levitical law so liberally? God did not strike either man dead for any supposed transgression of this law. Nor had there been any Scriptural exception

which would permit the high priest to depart from this legislation in order to show love to a fellow man in need. And yet when he did so, this high priest and David were not punished by God for so doing, as was Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6, 7), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2) who also departed from strict legal procedure. The obvious difference between the apostasy of these latter and the actions of David and Ahimelek lies in their recognition that even the letter of God's holy law may be superceded and set aside by other, higher considerations. In this case, human need takes precedence over any ritual, custom or practice. Keil and Delitzsch (*Samuel*, 218) comment:

If they were clean at any rate in this respect, he (the high priest) would in such a case of necessity depart from the Levitical law concerning the eating of the shew-bread, for the sake of observing the higher commandment of love to a neighbour (Lev. 19:18) . . .

- c. David's actions were consistent with good legal administration. If **what David did . . . was not lawful** (as Jesus says), then how is it that the Lord of the law can let what must be seen as a strictly illegal action pass without censure? Do we not see here the principle that law, all law, or any given law, is enacted for the orderly exercise of social relations? Any mature leaders know that exceptions to the law may be made when society is running smoothly and that the only danger in exceptions is when they become the rule and chaos results. At such a time, the return to strict law enforcement is needed in order to reestablish the order. Exceptions may also be made when it is evident that the purpose or spirit behind the law is not being ignored or violated by the exception. Now while this argument does not PROVE the rightness of Ahimelek and David's act in giving and receiving the presence-bread, yet it illustrates the fact that Jesus' concept of law admits the type of exception Ahimelek's offer proposes.
- d. David's actions were vindicated also by Jewish interpretation, as Edersheim (*Life*, II, 57) remarks: "Jewish tradition vindicated his conduct on the plea that 'danger to life

superseded the Sabbath-law, and hence, all laws connected with it . . ."

Mark's rendering of Jesus' words (2:25) puts more emphasis on this human need, proving thus that Jesus' attention is directed toward the claims of stark necessity in preference to hard-nosed legal procedure that would have deprived David of this essential food. The resultant thrust of Jesus' argument is: if David's hunger could set aside a divine regulation, could not the hunger of my men waive your interpretation of the sabbath no-work law? And if Farrar (*Life*, 333) is right in suggesting that David ate the bread of the Presence on the Sabbath, since the bread was only changed on that day (cf. 1 Sam. 21:6 with Lev. 24:8, 9), the Lord's argumentation takes on more force, as these Pharisees, to be consistent with their own principles would have had to condemn the high priest for attending to a sojourner on the Sabbath!

NOTE: The sectarian "law of prohibitive silence" is proven false by Jesus' declarations here! The so-called "law of silence" states that God has clearly commanded everything He wants men to have or do or be. So, if God has not spoken regarding any issue, according to this theory, He must be against it. But this theory of the tacit prohibition or "law of prohibitive silence" contradicts Jesus here, since God had not expressly stated anywhere that any others than priests could eat that bread and live, much less live and be justified by Jesus. This is a case where not the letter but the real spirit behind the letter was observed in careful conformity to God's intention and will.

b. *Work in God's Service is permitted on the Sabbath* (12:5, 6)

12:5 **Or have ye not read in the law?** Feel the climactic construction and striking contrasts that Jesus combines in this sentence!

1. **In the Law!**
2. **On the Sabbath Day!**
3. **The Priests!**
4. **In the Temple!**
5. **PROFANE THE SABBATH!**
6. **Yet, are guiltless.**

The service of God was the object in view behind the Sabbath-law, not merely rest. Naturally, the priests worked on the Sabbath in order to carry out the service of God. In fact, there was extra work for them

to do on that day! (Nu. 28:1-10; Lev. 24:8) Offerings for the redemption of the firstborn had to be made after the thirty-third day whether it fell on Saturday or not. (Ex. 22:29, 30; Cf. Lev. 12:1-8 and Lk. 2:21, 22, 27, 39) Ex. 22:30 suggests that firstborn animals had to be sacrificed on the eighth day even if it were Sabbath. (But was this the work of the priests at the tabernacle or temple or were these animals slain by their owner at home?)

But the main point Jesus makes is that, if the priests did NOT carry out their obviously laborious tasks on the sabbath, they would certainly be profaners of the seventh day. Yet who would dare seriously argue that they were, in any sense, violating the sabbath? And yet, by the Pharisees' own definitions of work, the law contradicts itself by making those governed by it to violate its precepts by keeping other of its requirements! **The priests . . . profane the sabbath** must not be taken literally here, for Jesus intends the word **profane** ironically, since the priests' work only appeared to be profanation due to its nature as real work. The Lord's statement ("priests profane the sabbath") is only a concession to His opponents' mistaken interpretations which dared force the Law to contradict itself.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 463) suggests that Jesus' preceding arguments were but the induction of a general principle from a particular case admitted by all, whereas here He proceeds to the specific case actually stated in the Law which verified the principle inferred earlier: "All ceremonial laws, including the sabbath-law, are limited in their application." He rightly teaches that even the Law itself presents its ceremonial applications as not absolute in character and those who would so understand them must contradict the intent of the Law itself. The ceremonies are subservient to the real motivation which caused God to give the ordinances in the first place: i.e. the motivation behind all ordinances is found in their service to the well-being of man. (Cf. Deut. 30) The only reason the Law required the hard labor of *the priests on the Sabbath in the Temple* was the spiritual need of the people, for it was this, and not with a mere outward regulation or form, that God was concerned.

But from Jesus' argument at this point may we infer that He somehow elevates His disciples to the level of priests serving in the service of God in a Temple greater than that at Jerusalem? Though this conclusion is not absolutely compelling, yet the reaction that this statement must elicit from His objectors would be: "Whom do you make your disciples to be? Of course, the priests work in the Temple, because they are required by Law to do so. But your disciples are

common laymen whom we have caught reaping grain on the Sabbath!" From this viewpoint we see that the Master may be hinting at a priesthood superior to that of Aaron, which would be described more fully in the literature of the New Covenant (i.e. the epistle to the Hebrews). On the other hand, if Jesus means to suggest no more than the principle, illustrated by this case in point, that "All ceremonial laws are limited, not absolute, in their application", then it is truer to say that He is merely attacking the Pharisees' own misinterpretation of the Sabbath regulations. However, see on 12:6.

12:6 **But I say unto you, that one greater than the temple is here.** What could the Lord gain by antagonizing the Pharisees with claims such as this? What is the relation of this sentence to His preceding argument? Trench (*Miracles*, 196) believes that this assertion is rationally explained as the response made by the Lord to a contemplated rebuttal by the Pharisees: "Then, lest the Pharisees should retort, or in their hearts make exception, that the work referred to was wrought in the service of the temple, and was therefore permitted, while there was no such serving of higher interests here, He adds, **"But I say unto you, that in this place is One greater than the temple."**

What is the **one greater than the temple?** (*toú hieroú meízón estin hōde*)

1. Can Jesus be the one greater than the temple?

- a. Trench (*Miracles*, 196) believes that "He contemplates his disciples as already the priests of the New Covenant, of which He is Himself the living Temple." In favor of this view it should be noticed that **temple** (*hierón*) is neuter and might seem also to have the weight of Jn. 2:18-21. Accordingly, Jesus' declaration would be: "I, God's living Temple and the immediate expression of the presence of God, am greater than the Jerusalem sanctuary." However, the fact that He is more often pictured as High Priest of the heavenly Sanctuary would caution us against viewing Him as the Temple itself, although it is true that, while He is the High Priest, He is also the sacrificial Lamb. (cf. Heb. 8:1-3; 9:11, 12, 24; Jn. 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6, 9) Perhaps it would be truer to say that, as High Priest of the spiritual order soon to appear, He employed His disciples in a service far higher than that of the Levitical. But against this alternative is the technicality of Jesus' actual accession to the high priesthood. (Cf. Heb.

2:17; 5:7-10; 6:20) Would He be considered priest prior to His own consecration as such, i.e. before He offered Himself in His death?

2. *Meizon* is neuter gender and so requires that Jesus' allusion to be something other than masculine, as to an idea, a principle or the like: "There is something involved here that is greater than all that the Jerusalem Temple stands for."

a. Taken in connection with the following verse (12:7), Jesus may mean that there is a principle of religion entirely overlooked by these narrow-souled objectors. There ARE matters of the Law weightier than all the purely ceremonial aspects, which include everything from the smallest tithes clear up to include the Temple itself. (Cf. Mt. 23:23; Micah 6:6-8; 1 Sam. 15:22) These are justice, mercy, faith, loving kindness, humility and real obedience! Taken in this connection, Jesus intends to specify precisely what is greater than temple service, by insisting that God wanted men to learn mercy, not merely how better to offer sacrifices. But, while this idea is certainly true in itself and much contextually in its favor, it may not exhaust Jesus' meaning.

b. Lenski (*Matthew*, 464) calls attention to three parallel situations in this section which in some way refer to the Temple:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) David entered <i>the house of God</i> | David ate the holy bread |
| (2) Priests serve <i>in the Temple</i> | Priests butcher sacrifices (their own food also) |
| (3) Something here <i>greater than Temple</i> | Disciples pluck and eat grain |

He notes also that in all three cases something occurs contrary to the Pharisean notion, but what is perfectly in harmony with the mind of God Who gave to Israel her Tabernacle, the Temple, and, lastly, the presence of the God-man Himself. Lenski concludes that the neuter adjective *meizon* ("greater") is more natural when seen as referring to something parallel in thought with "house of God" and "Temple", which are also non-personal references. However, he concludes that the former two symbolize the

divine presence, whereas Jesus' personal and immediate expression of the divine presence is far superior either to tabernacle or temple.

3. Despite the fact that the neuter *meizon* ("something greater") is the best reading of the Greek text, it can still be construed to refer to Jesus.
 - a. That *something*, in the final analysis, whatever it is, Jesus says, is superior to the Temple service. If so, it is superior to the entire ceremonial law which regulated the Temple. Later (12:8) Jesus places Himself above all the ceremonial law, even above the Sabbath itself, whence the implication that, even here, Jesus' presence and service is superior to the Temple.
 - b. Or, all that the Hebrews had in Jesus as the Christ was far superior to everything they enjoyed in the Jewish religion which their Temple was their most glorious symbol.
 - c. All that Jesus taught about true religion revealed a view of God and man far superior to all that the Jews had in their Temple service. But even this revolves around who Jesus is, i.e. He is no mere teacher, but the revealer of the mind of God.
 - d. Edersheim (*Life*, II, 58) emphasizes the Service to Christ in the following logical form:

The Service of God and the Service of the Temple, by universal consent superseded the Sabbath-law. But Christ was greater than the Temple, and His Service more truly that of God, and higher than that of the outward Temple—and the Sabbath was intended for men, to serve God: therefore Christ and His Service were superior to the Sabbath-Law.

But while we are searching for Jesus' specific meaning, let us not miss the thunderous impact that this shocking claim must have made upon His hearers, for, to those pious (and some not-so-pious) Hebrews, what could be higher, holier or more glorious than the earthly dwelling place of the glory of Jehovah? The truly devout could answer, with the understanding of Solomon: "Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee! How much less this house that I have built!" Even so, who does this young rabbi from Nazareth think He is, going around

to insist that what His disciples are doing is somehow part of a service to God *greater than our temple?*

c. *God's Interpretation of His Law is more lenient than yours* (12:7)

If you had known what this meaneth . . . you would not have condemned, means "You did not understand Hosea 6:6 and so you transgressed the spirit of real religion because of your ignorance." (See comments on 9:13; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 15:8, 29; Jer. 7:22, 23; Am. 5:21-24; Psa. 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:16-19; 69:30, 31) The seriousness of this charge ("You . . . have condemned the guiltless!") must be apparent, because it classed these Pharisees, "the righteous" with the most abominable sinners they could imagine, such was the heinousness of this their religious conclusion. (Cf. Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:18-23)

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) **Mercy** (*chesed*: "love, favor, grace, mercy, kindness," according to Scerbo, *Dizionario Ebraico*, 92; "Mercy, pity, piety of men towards God," so Gesenius, 294; *éleos*, according to Arndt and Gingrich, 249, refers to "mercy, compassion, pity." Usage pictures this compassion, called for by Hosea, as both that which God has for man and that which man must show his fellows. But which meaning best suits Hosea's intent and, consequently, Jesus' use here?

1. God's mercy: "I desire that you learn what my mercy really means, not merely how better to sacrifice; I intend that you learn to know ME, not solely the liturgies and sacrifices I taught you." Israel in Hosea's day was being destroyed spiritually from lack of knowledge, having rejected and thus forgotten the law of God. (Hosea 4:6) They had raised impassible barriers between themselves and God because of their sins and it could truly be said that Israel did not know the Lord. (Hos. 5:4) Their crying need was to sense once again the real mercy of the Lord. (Hos. 6:3) Though Hosea vividly portrays Israel's sins, and consequent judgments that must come because of them, (Hos. 6:7—10:15) he pleads with Israel to remember God's longsuffering love and constant tender mercies. (Hos. 11:1-11; 14:1-7) According to this view, then, Hosea was pleading that Israel comprehend the fact that God was not a mere great man in the sky to be placated by so many sacrifices and ceremonies. Rather He is a God who punishes the iniquity of any person or nation, and a God who delights

in being gracious and merciful even in the hardest cases, especially that in which Israel then found herself. In this case, Jesus' use of this text means: "The essence of real religion is not the perfect, punctilious and perpetual performance of the proper practices, but in knowing and responding to a real, living God who cares about man."

2. Human mercy. This view sees God as pleading, "When I taught you to offer sacrifices in the first place, what I was trying to teach you was not that religious rituals and ceremonies are important. What I wanted you to sense was that I desire that you show mercy. When you offer any sacrifices, what are the sins you confess for which you make those offerings? Sins against the people with whom you live. Now, if you admit that you need my mercy and forgiveness in relation to those sins, how much does your neighbor require the forgiveness and mercy that only you can give? And if, in harmony with your obedience shown through your sacrifices, I showed mercy to you, should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (Cf. Jesus' concept in Mt. 18:23-35) This view also has the advantage of harmonizing well with the original context of Hosea due to the heartlessness and unmercifulness of Israel. (cf. Hosea 4:1, 2; contrast Hos. 10:12)

Probably the latter explanation is the better, since it may also include the former. This is so, because those who really understand the mercy of God, have also grasped their own responsibility to show mercy to their fellows, even as God has shown them loving kindness. And, conversely, those who perfectly demonstrate human compassion and forgiveness have learned it from God. Another evidence that human mercy is intended is the prophet's antithesis: "*mercy and not sacrifice.*" Evidently, as sacrificing is a requirement of men, so mercy is something God expected of them.

Obviously, then, mercy to fellow human beings is far more important to God than the punctiliously correct but mechanical observance of the letter of the Law. Even so sacred an institution as the sabbath must take second place to deeds of mercy, because of the greater importance of people as human beings made in the image of God. The real purpose behind God's commandments and rituals was His desire to teach men the real value of human life and a merciful spirit that needs no law other than the cry of human need. All legalists generally tend to be tender and careful toward the rituals but harsh to

fellow humans for whose sake the laws were really intended. But by Jesus' constant insistence upon this principle (Hos. 6:6), we are led to see that that text lays down a principle which must touch and influence our understanding of the whole gamut of external ceremonies commanded by God: i.e. the external ordinances were not instituted for the sole purpose that man might observe them. Rather, they were designed to bless man by disciplining him for service to God out of the spontaneous expression of his own free choices. However, this observation of Jesus does not countermand either the Sabbath commandment, any more than that any of these Scriptures (Hos. 6:6 *et al.*) describe the end of material sacrificing. Far from it, many times in the same context, they pass rapidly from those spiritual sacrifices that are pleasing to God, to discuss the material sacrifices that must be offered in the right frame of mind. (Cf. Malachi 3:10 in its full context; note Jesus' way of exhorting to mercifulness, Mt. 5:23, 24) Even mercifulness of God shown a healed leper did not excuse him from ceremonial obedience to a Levitical ordinance that God had given for cases such as his! (Cf. Mt. 8:2-4)

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. By this citation Jesus proves that there were thousands of positive acts of goodness and mercy that the Jews should have been doing on any and every Sabbath. **I desire mercy** leaves them entirely free how to express the genuine concern for their fellows, but Jesus' scorching rebuttal unmasks their obvious indifference to the positive requirement that they actually do something useful whether it be Sabbath or not. Lenski (*Matthew*, 466) thinks that

Jesus is not speaking of mere humanitarian pity, nor of merciful actions inspired by the law. The mercy that Hosea refers to comes from the gospel, which fills also the Old Testament.

But this is not faithful to Hosea's context, since it would have made no sense to Hosea's original audience, if Lenski is right, nor could Jesus reproach the Pharisees for not grasping this concept. So He is discussing that real, humanitarian pity that causes a man to interpret and apply the Law in such a way as to do kindness to his fellow creatures. **Not sacrifice, sacrifice** here is taken typically for the entire ceremonial law, the Sabbath-law included, because the ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath was not the end-all of God's intention for giving the Sabbath. Thus, the Hebrews, should have been able to see that Saturday could have been spent in positive deeds of mercy that expressed the active love and compassion of God in them. Mercy is

something that is always lawful! (Cf. Gal. 5:22f "against such there is no law." I Tim. 1:8, 9)

Trench (*Miracles*, 197) poses the trenchant problem regarding the application of the principle Jesus stated: just to whom does the Lord intend to apply it, to His own disciples or to the Pharisees? He makes a good case for both:

1. To the disciples: "If you had at all known what God desires of men, you would then have understood that my disciples, who in love and pity for perishing souls have so laboured and toiled as to go without their necessary food, were offering that very thing; you would have seen that their loving violation was better than other men's cold and heartless fulfilment of the letter of the commandment." (I presume here that Trench means a "violation" of rabbinic definitions rather than of the Sabbath-law itself. HEF)
2. To the Pharisees: "If you had understood the service wherein God delights, you would have sought to please Him by mercy,—by a charitable judgment of your brethren,—by that love out of a pure heart, which to Him is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices (Mark xii. 33), rather than in the way of harsh and unrighteous censure of your brethren."

Should any suppose this standard to be the easier, because God requires **mercy** above rituals, let him be merciful and act fully consistent with this standard whereby he gives the other fellow the benefit of the doubt for but one single day, and he will see that God raised the requirement to a far more rigorous demand than ever before imagined! **Sacrifice** is by far the easier part of religion. Many can make great, expensive sacrifices (and they are necessary!), but how many submit to the daily discipline of being consistently merciful to their fellows?

Guiltless. This is the Lord's verdict. It must have brought raised eyebrows among those scribes who were even then straining eagerly to wring out of Jesus the very opposite admission. But even this scandalous remark will be rapidly forgotten after Jesus lays before them the authority upon which He arrives at this pronouncement of their innocence: "As Lord of the Sabbath myself, I find them not guilty of any wrongdoing on this day!" (cf. 12:8)

d. *I am Lord of the Sabbath* (12:8)

For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath (*kúrios gár estin*, Mt.; *hōste kúrios estin*, Mk.) Why does Matthew and Mark use

these special connectives (*gār* and *hōste*), when Luke proves that one can do without them and still have a grammatically good sentence? *Gār* ("for") is intended to introduce the reason why Jesus reaches the verdict announced in the previous verse, concerning the disciples' innocence, while Mark's *hōste* ("so") introduces what Jesus sees as the logical result that derives from admitting that "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." (Mark 2:27, 28) Since this latter declaration is Mark's record of the context in which Jesus made this great claim, we are obligated to ask whether Jesus was saying something about Himself, about any man, or both. Since "son of man" as well as "Son of man" have quite different meanings, even though both expressions refer to man in an ideal or abstract way, we must understand whether Jesus intended the one or the other meaning, when He surprised His listeners with this pithy remark. (Since in the original manuscripts of the Gospel writers all words were written in capital letters, capitalization in English translations are the result of translators' decisions about the meaning.)

1. "son of man" meaning "any man" taken as a Hebraism.

- a. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 29) argues that "on this occasion Jesus is not defending *Himself* for anything that He did on the Sabbath; He is defending His *disciples*; . . . the authority which He is stressing here is not so much His own authority as the authority of human need." While Barclay is right to sense this thrust in Jesus' argument, nevertheless Jesus' authority is very definitely under discussion. Even if the Pharisees attacked the disciples' practice, their intention was to undercut their confidence in Jesus by whose tacit permission (if not His direct approval) the disciples violated the Sabbath by their eating grain reaped on that day.
- b. "son of man" is a Hebraism referring to mankind in general (cf. Ps. 8:4; Mt. 12:31 with Mk. 3:28). Regarded in this fashion, the phrase is rendered by Barclay's (*ibid.*, 23) suggestive translation thus: "For man is master of the Sabbath."
- c. Mark's context (2:27, 28) seems to promote this conclusion by revealing that God planned the sabbath to be a benefit to man, not a burden. It also makes man, any man, lord of the sabbath in the sense that any man must decide what he should do with the sabbath so as to achieve

his own welfare and please God. The Sabbath-law was not the lord of man and might temporarily be set aside when its strict observance conflicted with his welfare or hindered his expression of the impulses of God's Spirit within him. But such exceptions only proved the rule and never replaced the rule. Man was not free to dispense with the Sabbath as his caprice led. Only in really pleasing God by obeying Him does one find the satisfaction of his own best interests anyway.

2. "Son of man" meaning that unique title Jesus took to identify Himself with humanity. (See on 8:20; 9:6)
 - a. Those who see this interpretation of the phrase in question argue that such a marvelous claim is perfectly harmonious with, and even part of the explanation of, the foregoing, less lucid claim that the Jews had in Him something greater than the Temple (12:6).
 - b. While sheer frequency of use is not determinative in discovering meaning, it should be noted that Jesus uses the phrase "Son of man" elsewhere as His own unique title. However, even though He used the words almost exclusively as a title scores of times, mere frequency of use cannot be the final, deciding factor, since, if Jesus meant "mankind" here in this one text, then that is His meaning. The true meaning of an author is determined by discovering what the author really intended to say, not by what we may determine from word counts, even though this method may help us approach the author's true meaning with more probability.
 - c. Matthew's introductory "For" (*gar*) argues that this claim explains Jesus' acquittal of His disciples, a verdict that calls for authority beyond which there could be no further appeal. So Jesus really is defending His right to say what He does.

If this latter view be the proper one, His vindication lies in what He Himself is. As rightful **Lord of the sabbath**, as His miracles and signs amply demonstrated, then He may declare what is allowable on that day. And from the uniquely Jewish standpoint that regarded the Sabbath above every other day, this makes Jesus Lord of all life, since, if He is Lord of the day of all days, He is then Lord of all

lesser days too. This self-revelation as the ideal Man who is superior to the Sabbath-law itself qualifies Him to know what was really involved in the original ordinance. It also qualifies Him to expose any tampering with its real purpose. This is why He defended His followers from the accusation of profaning the Sabbath merely on the basis of mistaken rabbinical notions which entirely missed the point of the real intent behind the Sabbath. Jesus is no longer arguing with the Pharisees, He is TELLING them, on the basis of His rightful authority, what the real meaning of this sacred day must be.

The great issue to be resolved here is whether God intended man to understand this concept of the original Sabbath ordinance now expressed by Jesus, i.e. that the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa. Could the ancients have known and understood this and, hence, practiced its meaning in proper activity on that day?

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 277) argues that "When the welfare of man conflicts with the observance of the Sabbath, the latter must give way. But of this man himself is not the judge, because he can not judge with impartiality his own interests. . . . No one is competent to judge in the case who does not know all that pertains to the welfare of man, and this is known only by the Lord." But this comment ignores the fact that the very lack of precision surrounding the Sabbath ordinance itself makes man the sole judge of what must be done. By deliberately being not casuistic, God literally left men really free to use the Sabbath in ways that their conscience, enlightened by His other precepts, might devise. And the quibble about the human intelligence being incompetent to know all that pertains to human welfare misses the great point that God left men unfettered in order that they might be free on the Sabbath especially to deal with those practical problems of mercy or necessity which men actually faced. This freedom left men even more responsible before God for what they did with the Sabbath! That freedom did not enslave the Hebrews with a host of tyrannical regulations but should have been the first lessons in that great principle of what we have learned to appreciate as Christian freedom revealed in Jesus Christ.
2. McGarvey's assertion (*ibid.*) that "the passage teaches, then, not that men might violate the law of the Sabbath when their welfare seemed to them to demand it, but that Jesus could set it aside, as he afterward did, when his own judgment of

men's welfare required him to do so," puts unnecessary emphasis on the word "violate". A man does not "violate" the Sabbath by exerting himself in his own best interests or in that of his neighbor, even though some stickler for the traditional interpretation of "work" might call his exertion "work, therefore, violation." The Sabbath-law was notably unhedged about with minute details about how it was to be observed. This left man largely master of his own decisions regarding what activities he could pursue on that day, activities, that is, which did not transgress what was actually written in the Law regarding that day.

3. The Pharisees' great mistake was that they had raised to the level of divine revelation those private judgments about what could (or could not) be done on the Sabbath. From the view of God's original intent, it would have been fairly difficult to violate the Sabbath, else it would have become what Jesus expressly affirms that it was not, i.e. the tyrannical lord of man.

But let it be noted, contrary to many older commentaries, that it is no argument for His requiring Christians to observe weekly sabbaths to say that He is yet **Lord of the sabbath**. For His fundamental argument here is that He is Lord of the whole Law that instituted the Sabbath for man's benefit. But this beneficial quality of the Sabbath is no argument for observing it further today. The Sabbath, as any other part of the Mosaic economy, was instituted for the blessing of the people under that particular system. The real stumblingblock for Sabbatarians of every age is their inability to conceive of the possibility that God could institute an entirely new and different kind of system or arrangement **SO FAR SUPERIOR TO THE SABBATH** or any other phase of Mosaic Law, that the temporary benefits of the Mosaic system seem detrimental by comparison! The Sabbath was a temporary means to achieve a particular end for a certain people. The Son of Man proved His full, rightful lordship over that day by disposing of the Sabbath in favor of a system far superior to it.

B. FOR HEALING A MAN'S WITHERED HAND ON THE SABBATH (12:9-15a)

1. SITUATION: A TRAP LAID FOR JESUS (12:9, 10)

12:9 **And he departed thence**, i.e. from where the former controversy occurred, but that He did not immediately **enter their synagogue**, we are informed by Luke (6:6) who notes that it was

"on another sabbath". But He DID enter the synagogue, and by so doing, stepped again into the arena with the beasts. Why, when His appearance was sure to rekindle the fires of controversy and invite attack upon Him? Because in the synagogue God's Word was going to be read and men would worship there. No fear of possible trouble was permitted to interfere with Jesus' felt need to be there. **Their synagogue:** these are the same Pharisees from last week's encounter. Luke (6:6) reports Jesus' usual activity in the synagogue as teaching. The wily scribes and Pharisees were maliciously watching (*paretēroun, paretērounto*) to see whether he would heal the cripple. **12:10 And behold, a man having a withered** (Luke: "right") **hand.** It is not clear whether he was "planted" in the audience by the Pharisees in order to make this use of his weakness, or whether his presence in the synagogue merely furnished the occasion they sought. Since Mark (3:2) notes that they were waiting to "see whether He would heal him on the sabbath," the man is very much in their mind as part of their scheme, whether he himself is aware of it or not. It might be that Jesus let them watch for quite a while (note the imperfect tense in Mark 3:2; Lk. 6:7), so long in fact that they felt compelled to make the first move. So they toss Him a seemingly innocent, almost academic question, but which, if answered either positively or negatively, would embroil Jesus in the very trap they had laid for Him. On other occasions they "watched Him" with similarly malicious intent, (cf. Lk. 14:1; 20:20) that they might accuse Him of Sabbath profanation which, if proved, bore the death penalty. (Ex. 31:14) Perhaps their testimony would go to the Sanhedrin.

Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? By asking this loaded question, they seem to call direct attention to the man's twisted arm. Could it be that they had judged Jesus rightly, i.e. they knew that He could not encounter the diseased arm without doing something about it? If so, how right they were, but how wrong they were to use this partial knowledge to combat Him on His own ground! Perhaps they thought they had found the perfect dilemma with which to finish Him:

1. "If He answers that healing may not be done on the Sabbath, we will unmask His inhumanity to man." (Or, granted the live possibility that these Pharisees were not all this sensitive to human problems, they would more likely have thought, "If He condemns healing on the Sabbath, He will prove us right.")

2. Or if He answers that healing may be done, we will expose His flagrant rejection of the ancient and revered opinions of the fathers."

Is it lawful? is itself a legitimate question, depending upon what one intends to do with it, for even the Lord Himself used it to open debate on the legitimacy of healing. (Lk. 14:3) But the Pharisees' motivation poisoned it. Lenski (*Matthew*, 468) sighs: "We see how little impression Christ's word regarding mercy has made on them, v. 7. They still ask only . . . 'is it lawful,' and not, 'is it merciful?'" But, because the case was not one of life and death, since the withered hand could wait until the next day to be healed, this was an excellent test case for deciding between the two conflicting views or approaches to Sabbath interpretation.

Is it lawful? What hypocrisy! The hierarchy consider it a matter of small importance that they desecrate the Sabbath in order to challenge, criticize, plot against and crucify this One who alone proved His right to govern it. They had no interest in proper legal interpretation, their hypocrisy being betrayed by their own censoriousness. Worse still, since genuine concern for man and a deep un-hypocritical love prove to be the best rules of thumb for interpreting God's laws, where these are absent, a close, slavish adherence to the letter of the law, which generally produces a heartless, inhumane application of that law to others, can only lead to a wider departure from its spirit.

2. JESUS' ANSWERS AND CONCLUSION (12:11-13)

a. *A Deliberate Intensification of the Tension* (Mk. 3:3; Lk. 6:8)

Jesus is not at all unaware of their secret motives. (cf. Mt. 9:4; 12:25; 22:18; Jn. 2:24, 25) He called the crippled sufferer to come forward to stand before the whole synagogue as the test case. Jesus' subsequent remarks are made so much more impressive by the sight of this man standing in a conspicuous position among the accusers. With Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 21) we can applaud, as he notes:

He met opposition with courageous *defiance* . . . We see Him openly and deliberately defying the Scribes and Pharisees. This thing was not done in a corner; it was done in a crowded synagogue. It was not done in their absence; it was done when they were there with deliberate intent to formulate a charge against Jesus.

b. *Jesus raises the moral issue* (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9)

Though they had flung this question at Him, as one would hurl a challenge, He bounced it right back at them to make them answer it: "I ask you, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" But by so doing, He exposed the Pharisees as mute, moral cowards in the presence of a real issue. And they cannot object to His question either, as if He had failed to answer theirs by asking His. Two reasons:

1. He who asks a question, asks the favor of an answer, and as suppliant, he has no right to dictate what sort of answer he shall receive. Therefore he cannot object if the answer he seeks is a question that exposes his own weakness and failure, if that question gets at the truth he seeks.
2. Some questions must be reframed before they can receive a proper answer, since, in their present construction, they do not lead to the truth ultimately sought, as the question flung at Him by the Pharisees here.

So, the real question is not "to heal or not to heal," as stated by the dilemma posed Him by the Pharisees, but rather "to do good or harm, to save life or to kill". Now, while "to heal or not to heal" is a legitimate question (see on 12:10; Cf. Lk. 14:3), to clarify the real character of the act of healing a man, Jesus sounds out the Pharisees' moral acumen by simply asking to what moral class of deeds does healing belong? Is healing helpful or harmful? Does it save or destroy life? When the question is put in these terms, it becomes instantly clear whether healing is justified or not. The real alternative then becomes not "to do it or not", answered "one must do nothing at all", but "to do good or fail and do harm", for, to Jesus, to fail to do good is to sin. (Cf. Jas. 4:17) To leave the man's hand shrivelled even one more day is to "do wrong", whereas to restore it immediately is an act of obvious moral excellence, worthy of a Sabbath intended to bless man.

But why should Jesus add "to save life or to destroy it"?

1. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. By carrying this question to its necessary extreme, which extreme has the moral approbation of His audience, He covers all the territory in between. That is, if the ultimate extreme be admitted, all lesser acts included in the principle are justified also. There seems to have been no life-and-death urgency about

healing the man's hand, so Jesus could not justify His act as "saving a man's life or letting him die". But if they admit the necessity to save a man's life, a much greater act often accompanied by a far greater exertion of energy or "work" then could they reasonably object to His doing the lesser, easier task of merely healing him?

2. Knowing that they were out to kill Him if they could but do it legally, perhaps His contrast is between their desire to destroy Him and His desire to restore a man to full life.

But they were silent (cf. also Lk. 14:4) Their silence on this moral issue must have provoked Jesus to real anger. (Mark 3:5) As He surveyed the entire group, He could find no man who would commit himself on this question. And the deep anger He felt was occasioned by their unwillingness to understand, despite the clear-cut morality of the issue. The mental block hindering their comprehension was, of course, their unwillingness to surrender their pride and reject their own conclusions, hoary with centuries of thought, that the Sabbath no-work law covered certain categories and not others, despite the fact that God had made no such distinctions or qualifications. *Hardness of heart* was that unwillingness to accept truth when confronted with it. (Cf. Mk. 6:52; 8:17; Jn. 12:40; Ro. 11:25; 2 Co. 3:14; Eph. 4:18)

But why were these theological experts silent when faced with this dilemma? Why did they not merely raise the objection that Jesus' question raised a false dilemma, presenting a false dichotomy and that there existed a third alternative not respected by His statement of the choices? Why could they not merely have objected in this manner? "But to obey the law of God as we are able to understand it is good, whereas healing is work that can be postponed until the end of the Sabbath. Hence, healing on the Sabbath is really to do harm, and we sincerely wish the man no harm. Further, the real choice is not between saving a life or destroying it, since only the man's withered hand, not his life, is involved. Consequently, not to heal his hand, Jesus, would NOT be to destroy his life, as you insinuate."

1. Perhaps the best answer to this quandary is the fact that in the case of the Pharisees, the problem lay not with logic but in their morality. There may have been something in the tone or manner of Jesus that indicated to them that He was not discussing solely the particular merits of the case of the man's withered hand. The unflinching gaze of the Son of man may have convinced them that He was bringing them to a

moral show-down. So the contrasts He sets before them describe the two distinct courses of action followed either by Jesus or the scribes themselves. Consequently, the meaning is: "Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good (as I am now planning to do for this cripple) or to do harm (as you meditate it against me), to save life (by bringing it to full, normal usefulness) or to destroy it (as you plan in my case)?"

2. Morgan (*Luke*, 85) suggests another alternative:

In the presence of a man like that, you do one thing or another: you either do him good, or harm. . . . You are either acting for his recovery; or you are acting for the perpetuation of his misery. . . . In the presence of human misery and dereliction, we cannot be neutral."

Whoever perpetuates pain or disability, when he possesses the power to help, becomes guilty of inhumanity, the most iniquitous of social sin. (cf. Mt. 22:39; 1 Jn. 3:15)

They were silent! They WOULD not say that doing good is lawful on the Sabbath, for this opened up too many exceptions to their carefully prepared but partisan rules. But, on the other hand, they did not DARE affirm that doing evil or destroying life was legitimate Sabbath activity. **They were silent!** This was their damnation, for it was their moral obligation, as authoritative exponents of Judaism and the guardians of orthodoxy, to take a positive stand for righteousness and truth right then and there before the waiting synagogue. Without any hidden motives or falsifications, they had to permit Jesus to bring perfect soundness to that withered hand. But their moral cowardice, grown strong from their constant leaning upon the authority and opinions of other men, kept them from braving the consequences of having to think for themselves or publicly change ground on this live issue. They were silent

1. Because they feared instant exposure as frauds before the people;
2. Because the Christ was powerfully and swiftly maneuvering them into an inescapable trap and they felt and feared His terrible ascendancy over them;
3. Because of their determinedly wicked hearts, since they had no intention of playing nice games of logic or morality with Him nor did they care about truth, for their avowed purpose was "to find an accusation against Him."

4. Or did some of them, deep in their conscience, really admit that healing WAS lawful and morally obligatory?

As learned men of the cloth, it was their duty clearly to pronounce judgment, but they said not a mumbling word. But by their silence they automatically surrendered their credentials, for who can trust the authority of a leader who in the face of a real problem must confess his ignorance and failure, especially in his own field where he had pretended earlier to be the expert? By their humiliated silence, they left Jesus entirely free to act without any possible fear of criticism.

- c. *Argumentum ad hominem*: "You work by helping a dumb beast"
(12:11, 12a)

Jesus says, "Even if you refuse to answer your own question thrown back at you, I will abide by the answer to it that you show by your own actions."

12:11 **What man shall there be of you?** Indeed, what **man?** (*Tís anthropos*; *tís* alone is sufficient to ask the question "who? or what man?" so *anthropos* becomes emphatic here.) Inhumanity was the Pharisee's fundamental failure, so the Lord asks, "Who does not have a man's heart to feel this?" The ordinary man, what would he do in such a case? But would the Pharisees' rules permit them to do what common sense dictated, if the sheep in question were their own? **That shall have one sheep:** this is the owner, not simply a passerby who happens to see the helpless animal, consequently, someone who feels personally the value of the distressed beast.

But is it legitimate to make out of this part of the illustration a claim to be the "Owner of man", as does Morgan (*Matthew*, 127)? The emphasis of the argument here is rather upon the relative value of men contrasted to that of animals and the response we make to each.

One sheep, i.e., this is not a question of the loss of the whole valuable flock, but of one lone stray. And yet, despite the toil and exertion involved in saving the animal (see the Lord's picturesque words describe the shepherd's straining!), hardly any owner would even dream that he was technically profaning the Sabbath. He would probably never admit to having profaned it at all. And yet, despite the clearly justifiable nature of this humanitarian gentleness to dumb beasts, it does represent a technical violation of the Sabbath law, unconscionably justified by the average legalist, though not, by any means, the most rigid rabbis. Here is the irony: the Pharisees, like anyone

else, have to live in God's real world, despite his own unrealistic home-made rules. Because of the very character and necessities of his own earthly condition, regardless of what the Pharisee taught about the strictness of Sabbath-keeping, he himself was forced to do things on that day that could easily be adjudged to be a very laborious process! These scribes must be made to feel the keen contradiction between their principles, by which they had attempted to blame Christ, and their own practice by the logic of which they themselves justified what He did. Their grudging, narrow-heartedness was brutally exposed by their own inhumanity to man in the face of their solicitous attention to their own worldly interests (by saving one of their own possessions on the Sabbath). But once they admitted the REALITY of their practice, this argument becomes irresistible.

12:12a How much then is a man of more value than a sheep! The effectiveness of this argument is proven by Jesus' constant use of it. (Lk. 13:15-17; 14:5, 6; Jn. 7:21-24) Study other uses of this standard of value: Mt. 6:26; 10:29-31; 1 Co. 9:9, 10. What kind of blindness is required to render men incapable of grasping the chasm of difference that yawns between all lesser creatures and Man, who God destined to be lord of creation! (Ps. 8:5, 6; Gen. 1:26, 28; 9:2) One of the sure products of a false or hypocritical religion is inhumanity to man. What incensed Jesus was the fact that these nit-pickers would not have hesitated to help a brute beast in danger on the Sabbath, but denied Him (and others) the right to minister to distressed human beings on that day! According to Jesus, any religion that makes its adherents inhumane is a FALSE religion, regardless of all its other pretenses to orthodoxy. Who would dare affirm that a human being is somehow of less value to God than a dumb beast? And yet Jesus' question remains one that has not even yet been adequately understood and applied by Christians.

This rhetorical question is really an exclamation of human value that damns all human rules and schemes that reduce a man to the brute level. Why is it true?

1. Because of man's inherent sense of worth; he, above all animals, is conscious of himself.
2. Because man is moral, even though this means he can sin where a sheep cannot. Man should be saved, because he is so valuable because of what he is.
3. Because of the infinity of the human spirit, not totally limited to the bounds of the flesh in which man lives.

4. Because God chose to communicate with and redeem MAN, not sheep.

d. *Jesus' Own Conclusion* (12:12b)

12:12b **Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.** This surprisingly elementary declaration rushes from the fulness of Jesus' consciousness and concept of God and goes straight to the root of the problem, shatters all the legalistic objections and immediately resolves the question. **Doing good** knows no seasonal limitations: this is what the Kingdom of God is all about. This is why positive helpfulness is not only permissible, but obligatory any day of the week. (Jas. 4:17) Here Jesus repudiates the standard ecclesiastical rule that healing might be done on the Sabbath only where there was danger to life. But more than this, He rejects the assumption that the Sabbath was instituted to make man somehow less humane, less willing to meet the needs of his fellows. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 34) says it well:

It was Jesus' basic principle that there is no time so sacred that it cannot be used for helping a fellow-man who is in need. We will not be judged by the number of church services which we attended, or by the number of chapters of the Bible we have read, or even by the number of hours we have spent in prayer, but by the number of people we have helped when their need came crying to us.

Jesus proved the validity of this proposition in his own ministry by healing not merely this once, but at least seven times on the Sabbath!

1. The demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue exorcized (Mk. 1:21-28 = Lk. 4:31-37)
2. Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14, 15 = Mk. 1:29-31 = Lk. 4:38, 39)
3. The sick man at Jerusalem's Bethzatha pool (Jn. 5:1-9)
4. This man with the helpless hand (Mt. 12:9-13 = Mk. 3:1-6 = Lk. 6:6-11)
5. The man congenitally blind at Jerusalem (Jn. 9:1-14)
6. The deformed woman (Lk. 13:10-17)
7. The dropsical man in the Pharisee's house (Lk. 14:1-4)

The conclusiveness of this answer of Jesus to their insidious question is shown by the fact that, whereas they had challenged the rightness of healing on the Sabbath, He proved that it is legitimate **to do good on the Sabbath**, and therefore, **to heal**. The greater includes

the lesser. (See above on 12:11) From this and the preceding illustration, it becomes clear that the Old Testament worthies, who interpreted the Sabbath law to mean that deeds of necessity and mercy were certainly allowable on the Sabbath even though this seems to contravene the intent of the law, showed greater understanding of the Sabbath institution, yes, even of the Law itself, than did these Pharisees who sought to protect its application by special casuistic interpretation. There should be no doubt that activities of any other kind than those of mercy or necessity were really forbidden by God, despite this more liberal view of the Sabbath ordinance. Nevertheless, Jesus demonstrated here once and for all that man, any man, was lord of the Sabbath in the sense that every individual person had to decide how best, within the few limits God actually placed on these activities, to worship God and to serve the needs of his fellows on that day.

However, the older commentators are greatly errant in supposing that Christ merely changed the proper holy day of the week to Sunday, making "the Lord's Day" a Christian Sabbath of which the modern disciple is obligated to make proper use through work and worship as if it were somehow more holy than the other six days. Even those usually doctrinally sound Bible students who seek to restore NT faith and practice in the life of the Church greatly err in limiting their concept of worship to what is done by the assembly of saints on Sunday in the local meeting place. The net result of this logic is the reestablishment of the "Christian Sabbath=Sunday" concept. Both errors arise from the mistaken conviction that Jesus actually regards one day higher than another, so that what is done on that day is somehow "holier" or more important or more critical than the activities in which one is engaged on any other day of the week. But God is no longer interested in making special holy days, places or special holy men in contradistinction to the rest of God's people, days or places. This is the prime reason why there are no peculiarly Christian feast-days or high holy days that are somehow more precious to God than any other. The stewardship of every day, the special sanctification of every hour by every person is that holiness which Jesus seeks.

Here again (see on 12:3, 4) the so-called "Law of Prohibitive Silence" must be found on the side of those Jews who interpreted the Sabbath law to mean that no deeds of mercy, or acts to alleviate human suffering, were permitted. The Law forbade the normal, week-day occupations. But it did not specify what activities might be legal when done on a Sabbath. The "Law of Prohibitive Silence", if applied here, must render quite illegal all of our Lord's Sabbath activities, for

in this He went clearly beyond what was strictly written. Further, He taught that man is superior to the Sabbath law and should be using it positively for his good and the good of others. Finally, the Lord argues as if He expected these legal experts to have grasped this truth and He holds them as inexcusable for their ignorance of it.

e. *The Miracle Proves Jesus Right* (12:13)

12:13 **Then saith he to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand."** The hand was the man's right hand (Luke) and, unless he were left-handed, the uselessness of his right arm only plagued him as he tried to work with his less dextrous left hand. Jesus had already recognized the high utility and splendid service rendered by one's right hand (cf. note on Mt. 5:29, 30). Notice Jesus' procedure: without so much as a command that the shrivelled limb be healed, without even touching it, Jesus simply asked the man to stretch it out. No Pharisean definition yet elaborated could possibly define what Jesus had just done as "practicing the profession of medicine and healing". Nevertheless, just as surely they knew that He had healed the hand. And worse yet, had they but the conscience to see it, they were going to have to WORK OVERTIME that Sabbath in order to prove that He had worked! For who could ever demonstrate that to speak a single word of such marvellous power to heal was an *infraction of the Sabbath?*

These Jews had in their own history the marvellous cure of the withered hand of Jeroboam by the man of God from Judah. (1 Kg. 13:1-10) This was done in connection with the terrifying sign that God had indeed spoken by the prophet. The chief difference between the two accounts (that of the man of God and this of the Son of God) is that the Judean prophet besought the Lord for Jeroboam, whereas here Jesus heals the hand Himself directly without public appeal to God.

And he stretched it forth. By this act the man shows his good sense, expressed his open contempt for the inhuman traditions and interpretations that would leave him a cripple another day, and confessed his faith in Jesus. Without great eloquence and profusive confessions, the man's simple act evinced his acknowledgement of Jesus' authority. He did what he had been told, even though he knew it impossible.

And it was restored whole, as the other, with the same shade of tan, matching callouses and identical degree of aging. Should we expect God to botch the job by mismatching the poor man's hands by providing him a child's fist or the delicate fingers of a lady?

The Lord had beaten the Pharisees fairly, without unnecessary roughness and with unanswerable argument and undeniable evidence. Instead of repenting or humbly seeking His indulgence for more time to reconsider His position, they are driven by their instinct to self-preservation and resort to "violence, the last resort of vanquished opponents." (Lanski, *Matthew*, 471)

3. THE NEGATIVE REACTION OF THE LEADERS (12:14)

12:14 **But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.** Their counsel was not merely about Him, but decidedly prejudiced **against him**. Justice and evidence, fair play and commonsense have nothing to do with this discussion among these ecclesiastics, for no gentle graciousness nor logical argument on His part could sway them from this verdict of guilty. Their reaction, according to Mark 3:6 and Luke 6:11 is immediate and pointed:

1. They became furious (*eplēsthēsan anōtas*), true enough, but their motivation may well have been mixed with envy of His sway over the people. Even a relative outsider like Pilate could sense this. (Mt. 27:18) Why should they not be furious? He had ignored their traditions, reduced them to silence and publicly shamed them on vital moral issues! Their list of complaints against Him is growing:
 - a. He had attacked their illicit economic gains produced by the market which He claimed desecrated the Temple (Jn. 2:13-16)
 - b. He applied Messianic Scripture to Himself (Lk. 4:18-21)
 - c. He claimed to forgive sins, risking the charge of blasphemy (Mt. 9:3)
 - d. He mingled freely with the scum of Jewish society (Mt. 9:9-13)
 - e. He did not observe their stated fastdays (Mt. 9:14)
 - f. He ignored their rules for Sabbath observances and justified His disciples in the same (Jn. 5:16; Mt. 12:1-14)
 - g. He claimed to be equal with God (Jn. 5:17, 18)

Lange (*Matthew*, 218) summarizes the fundamental basis: Objections of less weight, and an interminable catalogue of calumnies, were connected with these charges. But the real stumbling block of the Pharisees, was

that conflict between the spirit and the dead letter, between the gospels and traditionalism, between salvation and unbelief, righteousness and hypocrisy, and holiness and proud self-seeking, which Christ represented and embodied.

2. They immediately counseled among themselves what to do with Jesus. They had already proposed to kill Him in Jerusalem (Jn. 5:16, 18), but their intention had been thwarted then. Although John does not record any specific attempts made on His life, apparently His strategic return to Galilee blocked any immediate efforts in that direction. By maintaining a moving ministry (see on 12:15), He kept any concentration of hostile efforts from forming, thus keeping the attackers off balance. He had already faced their critical judgment at close range and ably defended Himself. (See on 9:2ff.; cf. Lk. 5:17ff.)
3. They formed an unholy alliance with the Herodians. (cf. Mk. 8:15; 12:13; Mt. 22:15, 16) The Herodians were apostate Jews who not only accepted Roman rule in Palestine and supported the wicked Herodian house, but also affected pagan practices in the name of "culture". It must indeed have been a fierce hate for Jesus that could drive these usually fastidious Pharisees to make common cause with those Hellenizing Herodians! Mutual jealousies and long-standing enmity were forgotten in this conspiracy against Jesus, since He was a menace to both parties equally. But what could motivate the Herodians to join the Pharisees? Maybe it was simply calculating political expediency to unite against this "upstart rabbi whose religious following could take on political overtones that menaced the status quo". Perhaps they too hated the high religion He preached that exposed their shameful lives.

How they might destroy him: this is their determination, not whether to do so but how. To the mind of those who accept the significance of Jesus' miracles, this reaction is completely irrational. How could people who had just seen God heal through Jesus turn right around and plot His murder?

1. Because they could not even guess the fearful power at His disposal, should He choose to use it in self-defence. (Cf. Mt. 26:53) Could He not use His powerful word to destroy them? Nevertheless, they do not hesitate shamelessly to plot.

2. They certainly did not accept the proposition that God was actually working through Jesus. Once granted the thesis that no Messiah could ever be like Jesus of Nazareth, it became a simple matter to fault Him with collusion with Satan. (See on 12:22-37)
3. And if this latter conclusion be true, they were obligated by their perverted conscience to proceed with His elimination, the sooner the better.

With fitting irony Lenski (*Matthew*, 471) unmasks the perverted Pharisaic conscience: "To heal on the Sabbath—a mortal crime; but to plot murder—a perfectly legal act!" Violence is the only hope of those who are frustrated in their attempts to silence truth. For those who have eyes to see it, here are the first indications of the inevitability of the cross.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the occasions on which Jesus was accused of breaking the Law.
2. State and explain briefly all His answers to charges of Sabbath breaking.
3. Discuss the Sabbath: the law as God gave it; the law as the Pharisees had interpreted it and tried to enforce it; the teaching and practice of Jesus on it; and our relation to the Sabbath.
4. Were the disciples accused of stealing the grain?
5. What was wrong with their conduct, according to the Pharisees?
6. Did God make the law to which the Pharisees appealed in their criticism of Jesus' followers?
7. Did Jesus justify David's conduct? How did He use the allusion to the incident in David's life to justify the action of His disciples?
8. Was Abiathar the High Priest at the time of David's visit to the tabernacle? How may the discrepancy be explained?
9. Where in the Law does God permit the priests to work in the temple on the Sabbath without fear of breaking the Sabbath commandment?
10. What bearing does this mention of the priests' work on the Sabbath have upon Jesus' conduct on the Sabbath?
11. What does Jesus mean by saying, "One greater than the temple is here," as some translators put it, or, "Something greater than the

- temple is here," as the Greek has it? What is greater than the temple?
12. How does Jesus' allusion to Hosea 6:6 advance His argument? How would their comprehension of this passage have kept them from condemning the innocent?
 13. Who is (or are) "the guiltless"? (v. 7)
 14. In what connection does Mark (2:28) cite Jesus' word "So the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath"? How does this help the interpretation of this declaration of Jesus?
 15. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' challenge: "Is it right to heal on the sabbath day?"
 16. What is the point of the sheep story?
 17. How did the Pharisees react to Jesus' healing the man's hand? What did they do?
 18. If the Sabbath was God's Law for His people, why is it that the Church does not recognize the Sabbath any more?
 19. From the fact that the disciples were gathering their own food in this simple way, what may be deduced about Jesus' use of His miraculous power to feed them?
 20. What proof did Jesus offer the Pharisees that demonstrated His teaching correct and approved by God?

Section 27

JESUS THE HEALING SERVANT
OF JEHOVAH

(Parallel: Mark 3:7-12)

TEXT: 12:15-21

15. And Jesus perceiving *it* withdrew from thence: and many followed him; and he healed them all,
16. and charged them that they should not make him known:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying,
18. Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles.
19. He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; Neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets.

20. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, Till he send forth judgment unto victory.
21. And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How does this passage harmonize with those instances where Jesus told some of the healed to spread the good news of their healing?
- b. How does this passage harmonize with those great public sermons that Jesus delivered where thousands of disciples and multitudes of listeners were present and so stirred up as to decide to make Him their King? What is the difference between Jesus' methods and the tactics described in this text as not to be used by the Messiah? How are we to harmonize them?
- c. Did Jesus ever fail to heal anyone? How do you harmonize your answer with the fact that at Nazareth, for example, He could not heal many because of their unbelief? (See Mark 6:5)
- d. Isaiah had predicted that the Messiah would not use any of the methods that great world leaders knew are absolutely necessary to promote great movements in human society. How, then, could Jesus possibly hope to succeed without using those methods? Now, after answering that question, deal with this one: how far has the church followed her Lord and how far has the Church let herself be victimized by the belief that success in this world is to be measured by the world's standards and gained by use of this world's methods?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Aware that the Pharisees and Herodians were plotting against Him, to arrest and ultimately kill Him, Jesus walked out of the synagogue, where He had healed the man who had had a shrivelled hand, and took His disciples down to the lakeshore of the Sea of Galilee. People in great numbers followed Him down there and He healed everyone. They kept coming from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, from the district beyond the Jordan and from as far away as Tyre and Sidon up in Phoenicia! This vast multitude came because they had heard about his wonderful ministry. Then Jesus suggested to His disciples to keep a boat just offshore ready for Him to board, because of the mob of people. He had healed so many people that the crowd kept coming, crowding around Him, trying to touch Him. Whenever people possessed by demonic spirits caught

sight of Jesus, they would fall down before Him, screaming: "You are God's Son!" Repeatedly Jesus sternly warned them that they must not interfere with His own revelation of Himself by their ill-timed revelations. Nor were the freed demoniacs to make Him any more famous than He was.

This all resulted in the fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah had written (42:1-4):

"Observe what kind of Servant I have chosen for myself:

Notice my Beloved who pleases me well!

I have chosen to put the fulness of my Holy Spirit bodily in Him. As a result, He will be qualified to announce true justice to all people, even to the Gentiles.

But He will not argue and shout.

Nor will He make loud speeches in the streets.

He will never crush the weak nor destroy the smallest amount of faith.

He will not stop until He has won the victory, making justice to triumph!

He will be the hope of the world!"

SUMMARY

So many people followed Jesus, despite His growing enmity with the religious leaders, that the people mobbed Him. Yet He kept helping them, keeping an escape route ready in event of necessity to finish His task. Among those who came for healing were demoniacs whom Jesus forbade to reveal His real identity and create more sensational news than His ministry at this point required. This total picture of Jesus at work brought to fulfillment something Isaiah had said about God's Servant: The Servant of Jaweh, fully acceptable to God would be filled with God's own Spirit, thus qualified to announce His judgments. His appearance on earth would be unassuming, quiet and helpful to the weakest. He would not give up nor fail without having accomplished God's purpose. Even the lowly Gentiles could have reason for hope because of Him.

NOTES

A. SITUATION: JESUS MAKES A STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL (12:15, 16)

12:15 **And Jesus perceiving it, withdrew from thence.** Here is exemplified in Jesus' own practice the very tactic He urged

upon His men: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (Mt 10:16; cf. also 10:23) His retreat in the presence of growing opposition is doubly motivated:

1. He steps away quietly from the immediate hostility and danger of the religious leaders plotting His untimely murder. He knew that He must eventually go to the cross and carefully prepared His disciples to face that hour, but His "hour is not yet come". Here He follows His own prudent advice given the Apostles earlier, whereby He may live to fight another day. Rather than destroy His enemies with a single word of power which would have blasted them into eternity, He patiently withdrew, giving them more time to reconsider His message and credentials. By His leaving, He took the pressure off of them, permitting them occasion for cooler reflection. In this we see the real meekness of our Teacher.
2. He withdraws, not merely to save His own skin, but in order to be free to continue ministering to the needs of people while there is yet opportunity. (Cf. Jn. 11:8-10; 9:4, 5) This motivation becomes clear, not only from the fact that He continued to meet people's needs, but especially from the strict injunction to silence He laid upon the healed, (12:16) Actually, the greater amazement is that Jesus was able to carry on His teaching ministry so well as He did, so famous had His healing ministry become! And, despite the time-consuming hindrance represented by the multitudes as their needs cut into His available teaching time, still He sent none away without helping them. (Cf. Mt. 15:30; 19:2; 8:16; Mk. 3:7-12; Lk. 6:17-19)

And many followed him; and he healed them all. (For details, see Mk. 3:7-12; Lk. 6:17-19) Why should the crowds flock around Jesus, whereas their own rabbis lost their crowds? What was the magnetic drawing power that brought these thousands from distant areas? Was it merely His wonderful power to work miracles?

1. His miracles are a concentrated exercise of divine power unknown even among the miracle-working prophets of the old dispensation. The great signs and wonders of ministries such as those of Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Moses, though directly connected with the giving of the ancient revelations, were not nearly so compactly concentrated in the daily labors of any

one of these great men. By contrast, Jesus' daily activities multiplied evidences of God's immediate, personal intervention into Jewish history. This excited the tired, disillusioned hearts of despairing Hebrews who longed for some word from Jehovah, some evidence of His concern for His people after 400 years of silence broken only by the now all-but-silenced voice of John the Baptist.

2. But something else, itself as soul-stirring as the miracles, proved just as marvellous and just as successful a gatherer of crowds as the working of signs and wonders. Jesus had proven Himself to be absolutely Universal: He was every man's Savior and Friend. He had recognized no classes, separated Himself from no man's need. Time and again He had shown Himself quite independent of the exclusivistic prejudices of ecclesiastical Judaism. He not only worked miracles and preached thrilling sermons. He acted like a God who cares about us. Despite the frustrations surrounding the teaching of His Apostles, because of the limited time left Him before the ultimate crises culminating in the cross, still He chose to teach His Apostles how to minister to people by being available when people had need. His example made His teaching easier to catch, so He really taught more effectively even though all seemed to conspire against His efforts.

12:16 And charged them that they should not make him known. (See on 8:4; cf. also Mt. 9:30; Mk 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; Lk. 4:34, 35, 41; 8:56) This order that they keep these things secret was absolutely essential if He were to remain free to continue His work. How little the common people really understood the pressure under which Jesus was operating. Pressure from the murderous religious leaders, pressure from the Zealots to establish a worldly kingdom, pressure from the crowds themselves to give them endless help of all kinds, and pressure from ignorant friends and disciples who thought they knew best. (cf. Mt. 16:22; Mk. 3:21; Jn. 7:3, 4)

Though the Master had specific goals to meet within the time limits of His earthly mission, yet here again we see a total absence of selfish ambition. There is not a foolish seeking after a greater notoriety so often found among leaders who would consolidate their popularity and support. Jesus knew that this would only counteract against all that contributed to the real success of His ministry. But even more notable than the absence of selfish ambition here is the

stern prohibition of that unwanted publicity. But the undesirableness of that notariety stems from two different reasons:

1. It is not the moment of truth for the final showdown with the ecclesiastical leaders which must ultimate in His death. Jesus does not confuse recklessness with courage.
2. Popular movements with their shallow, though high-running, enthusiasms have a way of trampling upon important truth, glossing over significant distinctions and ignoring some people as unimportant. This was even more true with the nationalistic movement of the Zealots and their fellow-travelers, to whom a wonder-working "favorite son" would mean the genius to spark political rebellion and revolution in which men would grind God's great ideas of Messiahship down into inflammatory slogans and uselessly extinguish precious lives.

B. RESULT: FULFILLMENT OF ISAIAH 42:1ff.: JESUS IS JEHOVAH'S HEALING SERVANT (12:17-21)

Notice how Matthew has organized his material: he places this evaluation of Jesus in the busy midstream of His ministry. Whereas before (8:17 et al.) he had gently suggested the Messiahship of Jesus on the basis of His fulfillments of ancient predictions, here he challenges the reader to reflect on all that he has previously included as evidence. The fact that he includes this evaluation here at a critical turning point in Jesus' relationship to ecclesiastical Judaism, throws into sharper contrast the Messiah who was really prophesied would come and the popular concepts that tended to deny certain features undeniably predicted in this undoubted Messianic prophecy.

12:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, that (*bina*) may express purpose, in which case it expressed what God had intended should occur, or it may mean result, in which case it expressed merely that Jesus' actions resulted in this fulfillment, not that it was His conscious intention to fulfill the prophecies to defraud or deceive the Jewish public.

Here is evidence contrary to the theory, popular in some theological circles, that some unknown prophet (or even uninspired editor) prepared the latter portion of Isaiah's book, chapters 40-66. This so-called "Second Isaiah", or "Isaiah II", according to scholarly imagination, is supposed to have lived in Babylon during the famous exile there, or even sometime over the indefinite span of several hundred years. (For fuller explanations of the Isaianic debate, see the critical introductions

to the OT in general and special introductions to Isaiah.) It is a popular theory which affects not only one's view of the prophecy of Isaiah, but also one's view of inspiration in general. This is because what is involved here is not merely the unity, inspiration and authority of Isaiah, but also the inspiration and authority of the NT Apostles is deeply immersed in this scholarly imbroglio. (See John Ransom's study "Jesus' Witness to Old Testament Inspiration" at the conclusion of this chapter.) How is this so? Because the authors of the NT cite specific OT texts, not merely a few times in passing allusions, but often, giving specific credit to the OT author. In not a few cases, the NT scribe introduces his quotation naming the ancient prophet and claiming that the passage is the production of the "Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets". For those who accept the inspiration and authority of the NT writers, this affirmation is not only conclusive but also signifies:

1. that the OT book referred to was actually written by the author mentioned by the NT writer;
2. that the OT writer was actually moved by God to produce what is now in our possession as the OT library or canon;
3. that to deny either inspiration or genuineness of authorship to the entire volume of any OT book cited by the NT writers is to doubt the inspiration and authority of the NT men themselves.

It is fashionable in some scholarly circles, however, to wave these propositions aside by saying that the NT authors do not delve into the technical problems of critical introduction, and therefore, based their own affirmations upon the opinions about OT authorship universally held up until their time. It remained until more recent times for modern scholarship to open these questions and search for answers to questions that did not even arise prior to the birth of German scholarship in the 1700's.

Notwithstanding this pride in human accomplishment, the evolutionary prejudices that fostered the conclusions may be dealt with by referring to the following evidence that no such evolutionary development in the history of the book of Isaiah (that we have today) has taken place:

1. It is gratuitous to assume that the spate of writing that began to flow out of eighteenth century Europe is the only attempt to delve into the critical questions that revolved around the authorship of the OT books. If the Holy Spirit were not

trying to tell us something by moving the NT writers to cite OT authors by name, often attributing their work either to God or to the Holy Spirit, what purpose could be served by deception at this point? Honesty impels us to confess that, if the OT situation is not that pictured in the NT, then a pious fraud has been perpetrated upon the believing Church by the very authors of the Book that documents that Church's divine origin and mission. But if we accept the divine origin of the NT, by that act we are committed to accept the critical information provided in the NT, especially on the subject of OT authorship and inspiration, matters which even in that first century after Christ were no longer easy to research. Who can adduce proof that the Holy Spirit did not intend, by the very manner in which He cites the OT, to provide exactly the critical information that we need on these vital questions concerning the OT's origin, unity and consequent authority?

2. Many of the citations themselves point not merely to the book that was then circulating under the name of a given prophet. They speak directly about the author himself and quote the message of some passage in his writings:
 - a. Study the manner of quotation, for example, in John 12:38-41 where the emphasis is placed upon the great personal vision of Isaiah himself. Young (*Introduction*, 218), after noticing that quotations are cited from both "first" and "second Isaiah" (53:1; 6:9, 10), points out that particular event in the prophet's life which proves John to be attributing these two prophecies "to the *man* Isaiah as author."
 - b. Note Paul's practice in Romans 9:27-33; 10:16-21. A concordance study of NT citations from Isaiah will demonstrate how the NT writers regarded Isaiah's prophecy.
3. But that Jesus and the Apostles were neither accommodating themselves to the level of critical knowledge of that day nor refusing to pronounce judgment upon the controversial questions which engage those who study the OT, is perceived by Young (*Introduction*, 30):

Jesus Christ is the Truth, and when He spoke, He spoke words of truth. It is true that in His human

nature our Lord's knowledge was limited, as may clearly be seen from a passage such as Mark 13:32. But this does not mean that He was subject to error. As man His knowledge may have been limited, but, as far as it went, it was true. Our Lord did not speak upon those subjects of which in His human nature He had no knowledge. All that He spoke was true. If our Lord was in error in questions of criticism and authorship, how do we know that He was not in error when He spoke of His saving death at Jerusalem? Admit error at one point, and we must admit it all along the line. In this present work the authority of Jesus Christ is accepted without reserve. He was, we believe, correct when He spoke of His substitutionary death, and He was correct when He spoke upon the nature of the Old Testament.

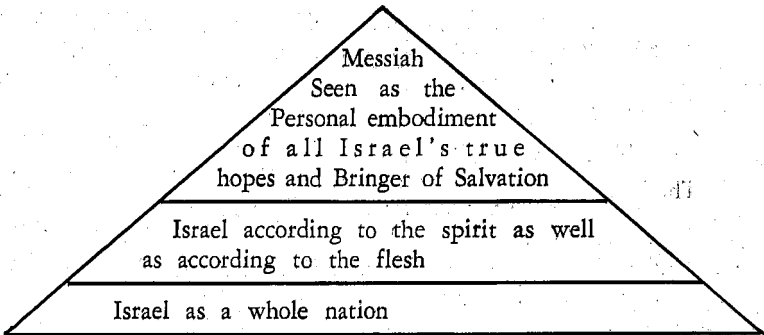
That which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet is not literally reproduced verbally from the text either of the Septuagint Greek translation nor is it even an independent translation of the Hebrew text, as a comparison of Matthew's citation which either of those texts will prove. In fact, Matthew provides here an interpretative rendering which shows its meaning or fulfillment along with the citation itself. And, since he bases no doctrine upon a peculiar rendering, no Jewish scholar can complain that his liberties taken with the text are unfair to the meaning of Isaiah or dishonest in the use he makes of it. Such summarizing of Scripture texts in such a way as to show their meaning is called by the rabbis "targuming." Thus, if the scribes themselves gave such interpretative paraphrases of their Scriptures, we should not be scandalized if Matthew uses the same teaching method. But, aside from good Jewish practice, when the divine authority of Matthew as an inspired Apostle is remembered, the modern reader can be certain that we have in this text the right use and correct meaning of Isaiah's original message.

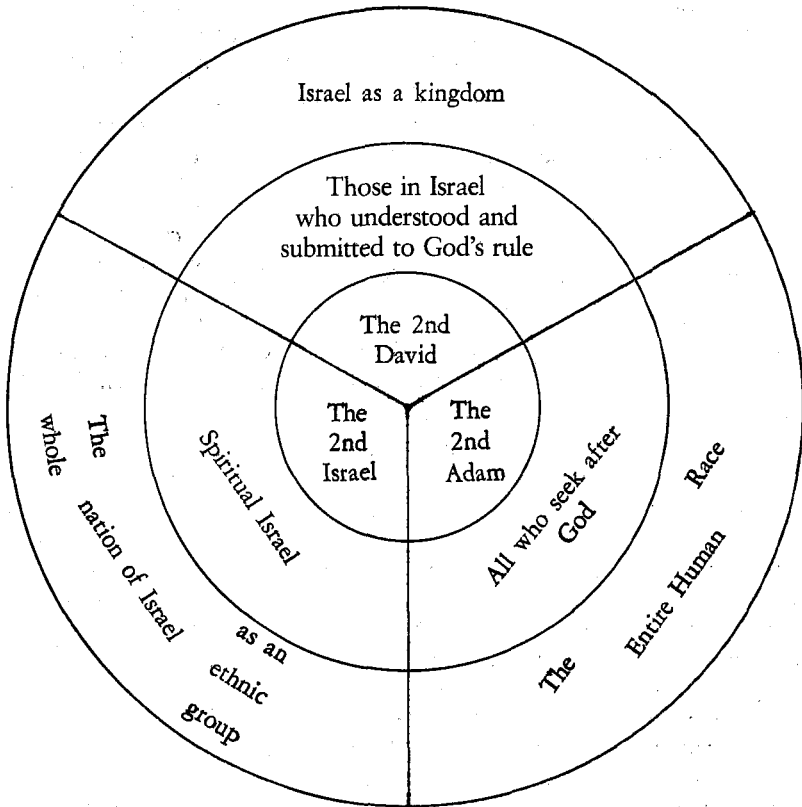
12:18 Behold my servant whom I have chosen. Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, II, 174) notes:

In 41:8 this epithet was applied to the nation, which had been chosen as the servant and for the service of Jehovah. But the servant of Jehovah who is presented to us here is distinct from Israel, and has so strong an individuality and such marked personal features, that the expression cannot

possibly be merely a personified collective. Nor can the prophet himself be intended; for what is affirmed of this servant of Jehovah goes infinitely beyond anything to which a prophet was ever called, or of which a man was ever capable. It must therefore be the future Christ. . . . Still there must be a connection between the national sense, in which the expression "servant of Jehovah" is used in 41:8, and the personal sense in which it is used here. The coming Savior is not depicted as the Son of David, as in ch. 7-12, and elsewhere, but appears as the embodied idea of Israel, i.e. as its truth and reality embodied in one person.

Study these diagrams suggested by Delitzsch, comparing also the notes on Mt. 2:15 (Vol. I, 72) and comments on Hosea 1:11 (Vol. I, 83).





As at the apex of the pyramid, so also at the center of the circle is Messiah who is the embodiment of all that Israel stood for, since it was God's purpose to unite EVERYTHING and bring everything to its full fruition in Him. (Cf. Eph. 1:3—2:22)

So, as Lenski (*Matthew*, 472) shows, if these diagrams represent significant OT truth, then even the LXX addition of the words "Jacob my servant," and "Israel my chosen" to this text is explicable, thus lending no support either to rabbinical or modern naturalistic exegesis that would deny Isaianic reference to the Christ.

Remember God's announcement using these words! (Mt. 3:17; cf. 17:5) Did the early Christians mean to call Jesus "the Servant of Jehovah" when they referred to Him as "the servant or child" (*ho pais*)? (cf. Ac. 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30) Nevertheless, it is significant

that this NT paraphrase of Isaiah's word chooses this word which admits a double meaning: *son* or *servant*, even though the Hebrew clearly said *audi*, "my servant, slave." In this gospel paraphrase is suggested that nice union of a servant's obedience and the preciousness of a son, both ideas being perfectly bound up in the person of Jesus. (Cf. Heb. 5:8; 10:7; Phil. 2:7, 8; Jn. 10:17)

2. HIS AUTHORITY AND TASK (12:18b)

I will put my Spirit upon him (*ep' auton*, cf. Mt. 3:16; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:32, 33) Thus, the literal fulfilment of this prophecy took place at His public anointing as God's Messiah. (See Notes on 3:16, 17, Vol. I, 117ff.; kindred prophecies: Isa. 11:1, 2; 61:1) From the point of view of Jews not yet capable of comprehending incarnation, this promise is essential to guarantee the unquestionably divine authority of the coming Prophet to do all that is here affirmed of Him. But this inspiration is not merely incarnation *per se*, because, besides Paul's telling us that Jesus divested Himself of equality with God to take upon Himself the form of a man, a servant (Phil. 2:5-11), Peter also asserts that the Lord went about doing what He did under the power of the Holy Spirit (Ac. 10:38). It is Jesus alone who "has the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 3:1), the power of God without measure (Jn. 3:34). Jesus claimed to have this power of the Spirit (Lk. 4:18-21), and His whole life and ministry was that claim's highest demonstration.

And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles. Judgment (*krisin* in Greek and *mishpat* in Hebrew), while signifying "the act of judging," "the result of judging," "justice, right, acquittal," or "righteousness (when seen as the sum total of one's judgments, his character)", derives its sense from the actual message that the Christ actually taught. For the Jewish parochialism, **judgment** meant that in the Kingdom of the Messiah the Gentiles would only be (1) completely annihilated, (2) merely punished and subjugated to the Jewish Messiah and His people; or (3) converted to Judaism. (Study the apocryphal apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period to appreciate this.) But as we learn from the Gospel of the Messiah as it was ultimately proclaimed by Himself and His Apostles, the **judgment declared to the Gentiles** is of a far different character.

To the Gentiles: what a contrast to that Jewish exclusiveness that would keep Gentiles from ever getting real justice. By contrast, Isaiah had revealed that the Messiah alone is qualified by God's Spirit to deal out true justice to the pagan nations. (See below on 12:21 and Notes on 8:11, 12 and 10:18.) While it is possible to

take **Gentiles** in the pejorative sense (cf. Mt. 18:17; 5:46, 47 which link *eibnikós* and *telōnēs*, to mean "the most godless unbelievers," perhaps we see the fiery judgments of the Messiah to be poured out upon the wicked. This is not too likely, since later in this same paragraph Isaiah speaks of Messiah as being the hope of these same pagans. (Mt. 12:21; cf. also Ro. 15:8-12)

3. HIS METHOD (12:19)

12:19 **He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets. Strive** (*erizo*, Arndt-Gingrich, 309: "quarrel, wrangle; cf. *éris*: strife, discord, contention") Like Master like servant. (2 Tim. 2:24) Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, II, 175) summarizes the Messiah's approach:

Although he is certain of His divine call, and brings to the nations the highest and best, His manner of appearing is nevertheless quiet, gentle and humble; the very opposite of those lying teachers, who endeavored to exalt themselves by noisy demonstrations. He does not seek His own, therefore denies Himself; He brings what commends itself, therefore requires no forced trumpeting.

How characteristic of Jesus' ministry that He got so much done without fanfare and rabble-rousing! His quiet success shames the many who seem to be doing a great deal (if we may judge from the noise they make), but yet produce so little, or even no results.

If we take seriously Jesus' fulfillment of this part of Isaiah's prophecy, the figure of "Jesus the Revolutionary" as an indiscriminate destroyer of the Establishment is unpardonably misrepresentative of His program, deeply ignorant of His real intentions and manifestly false. Violence, the pulse-beat of the Zealots and the Assassins, was to play no role on the Messianic stage, except as in the plan of God the Messiah Himself should have justice snatched violently from Him as He gave His life a ransom for many. (Ironically, even if we admit the exclusive application of this prophecy to the Jewish nation, those Zealots for nationalistic Judaism of every age, who plotted incendiary revolution, stand condemned by this their own Scripture. For, according to those rabbis who see no Messiah in these words of Isaiah, Israel must conquer by meekness, never by agitation and violence! What shall we say more of lightning war, heavy armaments and astute diplomacy rather than total dependence upon the leadership of the anointing Spirit?)

4. HIS GENTLENESS (12:20a)

12:20a **A bruised reed shall he not break, and a smoking flax shall he not quench.** **Bruised** (*sunetrimmenon*, Arndt-Gingrich, 801: "shatter, smash, crush, break," acquires the meaning of "bent" or "bruised" when used in reference to anything the strength and usefulness of which depends upon its being straight, as in our case a cane reed.) **Reed** (*kalamos*, Arndt-Gingrich, 399: "reed; stalk, staff; measuring rod; reed pen") In what character are we to see this symbolic **reed**?

1. As a simple *cane* growing wild along the riverbank? (Cf. Mt. 11:7; Lk. 7:24) If so, how would that attract the attention and interest of the Messiah? Is the emphasis here on the common people whose very commonness could normally be expected to lay no claim on the Messiah's attention, and yet He would really care?
2. As a *staff* with which one walks? It is not difficult to see that, once the fiber walls of the cane are bruised, crushed or broken, the staff becomes useless to the one who used it as his support while walking. Is there a sense in which God had been depending upon Israel, but who in the times of the Messiah would be practically useless to Him?
3. As a *measuring rod* (remember Rev. 11:1; 21:15f. in Greek)? Is the sense of this symbol to be based upon the normative character of Israel as the people of the Law of Jehovah, now not only badly broken but hideously distorting their witness to God before the world? This idea is roughly parallel to the **smoking flax** seen as a smoldering lamp.
4. As a *reed pen* (Cf. 3 Jn. 13; Ps. 44:2 LXX), the point of which has been crushed or, at least, bruised beyond the point where it can any longer be used as a writing instrument?

Perhaps the solution is not so much to be found in precisely determining which use of the word best describes the service to the owner, as in the recognition that the main feature of all uses is its instrumentality in his hands. Further, it is very likely that the **bruised reed** and the **smoking flax** will be parallel ideas. *Lanon rufomenon* may be flax or linen or something made of them. Here the application is to a lamp-wick that is smoldering. (Arndt-Gingrich, 476) These metaphors vividly describe the unfortunate, down-trodden, suffering humanity in contrast to the proud, self-sufficient, self-serving great of earth who have no need of God. Ironically, it has always been the **bruised**

reeds, those who confess themselves no better than a **smoking flax** that have really turned to Jesus for help, confiding their trust in Him, leading them to admit their failure and seek His transforming power. Those who view themselves as the brilliant, the powerful, the wise, beautiful people have very little motive to come to Jesus for help. (See on Mt. 9:9-13)

Morgan's (*Matthew*, 128) insistence, that Jesus must be talking only about sinners who deserve judgment but from whom Jesus restrains immediate, inexorable justice or punishment, instead of referring to imperfect humanity in general, is pointless, since there is no fundamental difference between the two. Any admission of imperfection on our part is sufficient to damn us, since absolute perfection is the standard. (Mt. 5:48) This prophetic text promises that the Messiah will deal gently and mercifully with this inadequacy and failure of any man in whom the light of faith burns low and who is broken, unable to stand erect for whatever reason. As the King, Israel might have expected Him to dispense with or dispose of all that was imperfect in the land, leaving only a race of moral supermen surrounding Him. But not Jesus. His mercy will not hear to treading down anyone or trampling upon the slightest evidence of faith in any individual, however imperfectly he expresses it. This verse marks the moral chasm that separates Jesus Christ from the rest of us self-interested sinners. We are ready to leap on the bandwagon of the strong, the successful, the prosperous, whereas Jesus' attention was directed to the weak, the failures, the no-accounts. We are embarrassed by the presence of the relatively "unfit for our noble company," but it is by this very group that the Messiah's great heart was stirred to do something about their condition. (See on 9:35-38) And, greater still, He would not break even a **bruised Pharisee reed** nor quench a **smoking Sadducean wick!** He did not make use of the world-shaking power available to Him at His immediate call, in order to destroy the opposition. Even late in His ministry He was still trying to bring about that stupendous miracle of miracles: the conversion of Pharisees!

5. HIS RESULTS (12:20b)

At this point Matthew's quoting becomes considerably freer and more interpretative in light of the fulfillment which he desires to indicate. While he may leave out two lines of a whole verse and translate rather freely part of another, it will be seen that he has lost none of the essential meaning. Whereas Matthew has **unto victory** (*eis nikos*), Isaiah's Hebrew text had "in truth" (*le'emet*, translated

by LXX *eis alétheian*) Our Evangelist apparently made this change for very good reasons:

1. *Emeth*, or "truth" in Hebrew has several splendid nuances all of which enrich Isaiah's meaning: "Permanency, durability, firmness, stability, perpetuity, security; truth". (Cf. Gesenius, 63; Bagster, 19; Scerbo, 15) Any or all of these terms picture a Messiah whose zeal will not be extinguished, nor will anything break His strength, till He shall have succeeded in establishing justice so permanently, so truly that nothing else can disturb or hinder or change it. That, says Matthew, is nothing short of total **victory!** (Contrast Hab. 1:4; Isa. 59:9-14; 5:7)
2. Another of Matthew's reasons may have been that the first part of Isa. 42:4 contains a Hebrew word-play, which, while translatable into Greek, can also be summarized simply by the word **victory**.
 - a. The Hebrew puns have obvious relation to what was earlier affirmed of the Messiah: "He will not burn dimly nor be bruised," which means: "He will succeed."
 - b. Another evidence that Matthew is simply telescoping Isaiah's two verses (42:3b, 4) into one is the fact that he begins his citation of 42:3b (or Mt. 12:20b) with **till** (*héōs an*) whereas Isaiah had no conjunction whatever and the LXX inserts "but" (*alla*). The word **till** obviously comes from Isa. 42:4b where it introduces a clause similar in meaning to Isa. 42:3, and correctly summarizes the meaning of the intervening material.
3. Matthew's free quoting of the Hebrew text should pose no obstacle, since as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 206) has pointed out, the common practice of the day was to give an interpretative quotation. The distinct difference between Matthew and the rabbis, of course, consists in the divine authority which he brings to these interpretations by virtue of his own inspiration as Christ's Apostle.
4. In the ultimate analysis, what is the difference between *truth* as a concept, and **victory**, meaning "success" or "results"? If apprehension of reality be the only truly functional view of the universe, then only what recognizes that truth, or reality, can succeed. The ultimate pragmatism can be based only upon ultimate truth. Temporary victories based upon limited reality can never claim finality, for only total truth, or com-

plete reality, can prevail, because this is just the way things really are. Or, to put it another way, only that can succeed which abides by God's rules.

Unto victory, applied to the Messiah's work in context with the murderous hate of the Pharisees, tolls the death knell for every form of opposition that dares rear its head against God's Anointed Servant!

6. HIS UNIVERSALITY (12:21)

12:21 **And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.** Comparison with Isaiah's original reveals that Matthew has omitted the first two lines of Isa. 42:4: "He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set justice in the earth." As suggested above, he probably intended to synthesize the meaning of the two verses into one, thus shortening the quotation without losing any of its essential meaning. Isaiah had also written: "And the isles shall wait for his law," (Isa. 42:4c), whereas the LXX translates, with only one minor variant, exactly as Matthew has it: "And upon his name shall the Gentiles hope." What was the link that the LXX translators and Matthew see between the Messiah's "law" and His "name"?

1. The Messiah's Torah (his *law*) is the revelation He brings to the nations.
2. His **name** is not merely some personal name, but, as in the case with the various names of God, is a special term expressing some grand revelation about Himself. The **name** suggests all that the Messiah will be. Consequently, the Gentiles will find hope in all that His name reveals about His office, His doctrine, His standards, etc.

Gentiles: see also Isa. 42:6, 7 where the description continues of Messiah's personality and work for "the people" and "the nations." The complete fulfilment of this prophecy regarding a ministry to the Gentiles was not realized until some time after Jesus' earthly ministry was terminated by His ascension. Nevertheless, as explained at Mt. 10, the work of the Apostles, and of the Church born of their preaching, is simply the extension of the ministry of Christ in the world, especially among the **Gentiles**. But Jesus was not insensitive to the problems or faith of pagans even during His earthly work. Matthew has already touched very gently upon the Messiah's universality that ignores racial barriers. Besides inserting the names of at least three **Gentiles** into Jesus' genealogy, he recorded the visit of the presumably Gentile Magi (2:1-12), documented Jesus' interest in "Galilee of the Gentiles"

(4:12-17), examined His cure of the Roman centurion's slave (8:5-13) and described the disciples' later witness as to be "before Gentiles" (10:18). Is there any hint, however, that among the crowds that assembled around Jesus from Idumea, beyond the Jordan, Tyre, Sidon and Syria, were any Gentiles present in significant numbers? (Cf. Mt. 4:24, 25; Mk. 3:7)

In his name shall the Gentiles hope. Is this to be construed as evidence of a world-wide expectation, anticipating the coming of Christ to the Gentile world? Does Isaiah mean to suggest that the pagans would long for the birth of Jesus?

1. Taken subjectively, probably not, since many turned their backs upon Him when He did appear, and many flatly rejected the Gospel of a crucified Savior preached by His emissaries. (1 Co. 1:18ff.) The world would certainly be longing for something or someone who could fill the vast moral void and bring light to the intellectual darkness of their hopeless existence. That is, having scoured the earth for answers to their deepest problems, the Gentiles would collapse in hopelessness because of the apparent futility of living even another day. Yet, because they do manage to suffer another day, they sense the blind hope arising in them that there must be some sense to life, despite all the madness that surrounds them. But where is it to be found? It is into this spiritual vacuum and desperation that Messiah will come with answers, life and joy, direction and spiritual power.
2. Objectively, whether the pagans realized it or not, or whether the Jews wanted it or not, Christ was to be the hope of the world!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus retreat before those who began to declare themselves openly as His enemies?
2. Show how Jesus' ministry was a complete fulfilment of the prophecy cited in this section. Identify the prophecy and show its meaning.
3. Explain how Jesus' ministry fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would bless the Gentiles, even though, as a group, there were few Gentiles who ever really were contacted by Him personally. List all the specific incidents in which Jesus deliberately and personally helped Gentiles. Then list all the hints and overtones that indicate Jesus' interest in the salvation of the Gentiles, as well as the Jews.

4. Tell the meaning of the description of the Messiah: "He shall not strive nor cry aloud; Neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets." How was this fulfilled in the way Jesus carried on His work? Did Jesus ever defend Himself by exerting His supernatural strength?
5. Explain the beautiful picture of Jesus, expressed under the figure of someone who would not "break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax." Who or what is represented by the reed and the flax?
6. What tactic did Jesus use when near the Sea of Galilee, in order to make possible better crowd control when they crowded Him too closely?
7. Where did all the people come from? Of what significance is this fact in showing how Jesus began more fully to fulfil the prophecy of the Messiah's ministry to Gentiles?
8. Trace in outline form the larger fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy through the Christ's ministry to the Gentiles by means of the Church's evangelistic efforts after Pentecost.

Section 28

JESUS ANSWERS THE CHARGE OF BEING IN LEAGUE WITH SATAN

(Parallel: Mark 3:19-30)

TEXT: 12:22-37

22. Then was brought unto him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the dumb man spake and saw.
23. And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, Can this be the son of David?
24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons.
25. And knowing their thoughts he said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:
26. and if Satan casteth out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?
27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges.

28. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.
29. Or how can one enter into the house of the strong *man*, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.
30. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.
31. Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.
32. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.
33. Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit.
34. Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.
35. The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things; and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.
36. And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.
37. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How can one's friends and family be a more treacherous hindrance to one's work and the accomplishment of one's mission, than any number of outsiders who attack openly from without? See Mark's parallel text.
- b. Do you think that Jesus' *friends* or His *family* tried to hinder His busy ministry by attempting to seize Him? On what basis do you decide this?
- c. Why would the crowds begin to remark that Jesus "could not be the Son of David, could He?" when they knew His name to be Jesus? What are they suggesting in this negative way?
- d. The Pharisees were no fools, even though badly mistaken about Jesus. How could they charge with any plausibility at all that "this man does not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons"? What is the unstated premise behind this asser-

tion, a premise more or less acceptable to their audience, which rendered logically unobjectionable their conclusion?

- e. Explain the opposite of the common proverb: "Seeing is believing." These Pharisees actually saw Jesus cast the demon from the blind, dumb demoniac and yet did not believe Him. They saw but did not believe. Why? What kind of mental block does it require to reject the meaning of what the senses undoubtedly see?
- f. Is it ever necessary to use logical arguments to deal with the false beliefs of others? Following good Bible examples some believe that to quote a passage of Scripture is all that is required to correct the false or inadequate arguments of others. How does Jesus' method in this section broaden our view on this question?
- g. Why would Jesus' family and friends think that He was going crazy? Does not this fact, that the people closest to Jesus suspected His mental sanity, disturb you? We have argued before that Jesus must either be a gross imposter, insane or else precisely what He claimed to be. How does this evidence from the personal observations of those closest to Jesus affect our understanding of His nature and claims?
- h. Do you believe that demons inhabit the world today? If so, where? If not, why not? Can you explain the apparent phenomenon that demons do not show the same character as during the lifetime of Jesus? Was that merely a wonder "strictly limited to that credulous age," as some hold, or have demons changed their tactics to accommodate to the age?
- i. What is your opinion: could Satan and/or demons make more progress in our materialistic age by pretending not to exist, while continuing their demonic activity in the souls of men? Beware of labelling every thing you do not like "demonic activity," but, with this caution in mind, do you see any evidences of demonic activity in our age? If so, what Biblical passages lead you to conclude that demons are really at work in what you see? If not, what Scripture leads you to conclude that no demons are at work?
- j. Supposing that modern-day miracles, regardless of the religious tenets of the one performing them, are actual, verifiable facts, what safeguards do we have that protect us from either (1) attributing miracles done by God's power to Satan's agency, thus blaspheming in one way the Holy Spirit, or else (2) being ourselves deceived by demons, hence led off into damning heresy? Should we disregard the religious tenets of the one performing the true, verifiable miracle? What should we do if his ministry

- glorifies Jesus, leading men to true conversion in harmony with the already revealed will of Christ in the New Testament? What other Bible passages bear on this subject?
- k. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all deity, as the Bible teaches, how can it be that sin against the Father and Son would be forgiven, but not sin committed against the Holy Spirit? What, in the nature of the work of each, helps us to answer this?
 - l. So many people have difficulty understanding the meaning of the expression "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." Do you believe that this sin is serious? Do you believe that such a sin would be so involved and so difficult to understand that not only would most people commit it without ever knowing it, but also that most Christians would not be able to protect themselves against it, due to its mysterious, hidden nature? If so, then what has God's mercy provided as an escape or an antidote against it? If not, then the sin against the Holy Spirit must be something very fundamental and necessarily obvious by nature, and something which involves the daily thought and practice of everyone. What, then, do you conclude to be "blasphemy, or the sin, against the Holy Spirit"?
 - m. There exist in our *vocabulary* words that have lost their meaning. However, are there any words in our *speech* that are entirely devoid of meaning, words about which we can say, "But I did not mean anything by what I said"? Are there any words that do not count, words for which God will not hold us accountable?
 - n. Why are a man's words so good an index of his character?
 - o. If a person thinks he has committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and is deeply disturbed about it, has he, in fact, sinned against the Holy Spirit? How do you know? What should be done about (or for) such a person? Can we tell when a person has committed this sin?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus returned home to Capernaum. But no sooner had He arrived than a large crowd of people assembled, leaving Jesus and His disciples no time nor opportunity to eat. When His relatives heard how much pressure under which He was working, they came to take Him away by force to save Him from Himself, because they were saying, "He is going crazy!"

Just then a blind, dumb demoniac was brought to Jesus. He healed him, casting out the demon. The result was that the dumb

man could both speak and see. All the by-standers, amazed by what they saw, kept remarking, "Jesus could not be the Messiah, could He? . . ."

But when the Pharisees and theologians, who had made a special trip down from Jerusalem, heard that kind of talk, they growled, "He Himself is possessed by Satan! It is only by special secret agreement with the king of evil spirits, that this guy drives out the demons!"

Knowing what was in their minds, Jesus deliberately called them to Him and said in proverbial form: "Tell me, how CAN Satan drive out Satan? A kingdom torn by civil war is easily destroyed. No divided kingdom can last for long. A city or home filled with division and strife soon destroys itself. So, if Satan rebels against himself, i.e. if Satan casts out Satan, as you say, then he is fighting himself! How long can this rule last? If you are right, then he is destroying himself! And that's the end of him! Stop complaining and rejoice!

"Further, if I drive demons out by invoking the devil's powers, as you argue, by what secret agreement do your own people drive them out? If this is your argument, then they themselves will decide whether you are being fair with me or not.

"On the other hand, if my secret power is really God's Spirit that is destroying the power of Satan's might, then you may be certain that God's Kingdom and God's rule has just come to earth. It is in your midst and you fail to see it!

"Or to put it another way: how could anyone break into the house of a strong man like Satan and rob him of his victims, unless he first tie him up? He cannot. But if Satan were bound and gagged, then a person like me could ransack his house and free as many demonized victims as he pleased.

"Do not forget that anyone who is not on my side is automatically against me! Anyone who does not help me, hinders. Satan fights me; not for me!

"So I can tell you for sure that God can forgive people for any sin and slander, yes, whatever blasphemy they utter. But to slander God's Spirit is to go beyond the point where God cannot forgive you. Even someone who says something against me, Jesus, can be forgiven. But the man who speaks against or slanders the Spirit will not be forgiven—never—either in this world or in the world to come. That man is guilty of eternal sin".

(Jesus said this because they were saying, "He is possessed by an unclean spirit," instead of recognizing His work as that of the Holy Spirit.)

Jesus went on, "Choose: if you see that a tree's fruit is good, you know that it is a tree of quality. If you see that a tree's fruit is bad, then you must admit that the tree is bad too. You can tell what kind of tree it is, by the fruit it produces. You sons of snakes! How can what you say be good, when you are yourselves evil? Whatever is really in your heart will find expression in your talk; it must come out! That with which you have filled your life is betrayed by your talk. A man that is really good at heart talks like it, and conversely, an evil man cannot help but reveal the evil that is in him. It will come out in what he says. I can tell you this: men will stand accountable on judgment day for every thoughtless word they have ever said! Do you realize that you could go to hell or be eternally saved just on the basis of what you once said here on earth?"

SUMMARY

Jesus' family and friends tried to interfere with His ministry. Since He drove Himself so hard, people thought Him to be going mad. Jesus cast the demon from a blind and dumb man. Excited crowds began to attribute Jesus' power to that which would animate the Messiah. The religious leaders tried to stifle Jesus' influence with the people by charging His stupendous feats to being in league with Satan. Jesus' brilliant rebuttal was:

1. Satan is fighting himself? Rejoice, he will not last long that way!
2. You do not molest those Jews among you that purportedly cast out demons, why bother me?
3. Reasonable alternative: God's Spirit empowers me.
4. To overcome Satan, one must actually be mightier than Satan.
5. Neutrality is impossible: either between Satan and me or between you theologians and me.
6. Beware of slandering God's Spirit.

No talk is cheap, since for good or ill, talk reveals the real content of a man's life. There are no words that do not count.

NOTES

A. SITUATION

1. THE HEALING OF A BLIND, DUMB DEMONIAK RESULTED IN THE CROWD'S ASKING IF JESUS BE THE MESSIAH. (12:22, 23)

12:22 Then was brought to him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that

the dumb man spake and saw. (Cf. Mt. 9:32-34 and the Notes thereon. For a fuller defense of the accounts of demon-possession and of the reality of demons, see Notes on 8:28—9:1 and on 10:8. It should be evident that no part of the following conversation can have any sense, unless both the Lord and His critics are actually correct in their assuming that (1) demons have objectively real existence and are known to inhabit human beings, and that (2) Jesus literally expelled them with a word. Whatever case may be made for the Pharisees' superstitious ignorance of the true explanation behind the observable phenomena, one cannot deny that they had no doubts about the certainty of their occurrence, nor about the fact that He had really cast the demon out.

Is this the same event as recorded in Luke 11:14, 15, 17-23? That it may not be the same event repeated from Mt. 9:32 is evidenced by the fact that the former demoniac was dumb (*kōfos*), whereas this man is both blind and dumb (*tuflós kai kōfos*), although it is possible that Matthew has included the fuller discussion here, since it might have been inappropriate at that earlier place. Here he can expand upon Jesus' answers to the Pharisees' libellous charges, whereas had he included this material in chapter 9 the organization of what we may suppose to be his outline would have been clumsy. (See Notes on Matthew's organization of his materials, especially on 4:23-25; 9:35-38.) If this is what really happened, the fact of the demoniac's blindness may not have been important enough to mention. And due to the topical character of Matthew's narrative, it may be that he has included here, for special reasons, the narrative recorded by Luke (11:14-23) in its proper chronological setting.

12:23 **And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"** (Cf. similar popular reactions to Jesus' miracles: Mt. 9:32-34; Mk. 1:27; Mt. 9:8; Lk. 7:16; Mt. 8:27, 34; 13:54, 57) The trend of these passages indicates that, although there were undoubtedly many individual reactions that parroted the snarl of the Pharisees or else ended merely in a curiosity-satisfied about supernatural phenomena, nevertheless the consistent impression made by Jesus' mighty works was that God was doing them. People sensed that God had come near to His people. But more than this, they began to draw nearer to the conclusion to which Jesus had so skillfully led them. "Could this be the Messiah?" (Cf. Jn. 10:37, 38) And the effect continued. (Jn. 6:14; Mk. 7:37; Mt. 15:31; Lk. 9:43; 13:17; 18:43) **The Son of David**=Messiah, the Christ. (Cf. Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30) **Can this be? This** is a surprisingly emphatic

demonstrative pronoun: **this** man of all people who does not look nor act like the Messiah we expect, can HE be the Messiah? **Can this be?** (*méti hoútos estin*) is a question asked in Greek as if a negative answer were expected ("This could not be the Messiah, could it?"), but because of the circumstances in which it is offered, one can almost feel the half-joyful, half-fearful tension in those who dared voice it in the presence of those great theological experts, the Pharisees. (Cf. Jn. 7:31) This hesitation born of perplexity is certainly justified by their long experiences with the rabbis and by the retort growled by those theologians just as soon as this wavering question is voiced.

Worse still, their timid question is accompanied by no recorded challenge to the blasphemous dogmatic assertion of the Pharisees that Jesus' miracles were but the result of satanic collusion. In Jerusalem others had defended the Lord when essentially the same accusation was levelled at Him (Jn. 10:21), yet here in Galilee no one said a mumbling word of defense (so far as the record goes). Farrar (*Life*, 346f.) suggests two chief reasons for this:

1. Despite the merciful expressions that convinced them of His real concern for them, they intuitively sense that in His presence they stood on that twilight zone between the earthly, workaday world and the real, unseen world of spirits. Until they are personally convinced that the Spirit He represents is God's and not Satan's, the awesomeness of His personal powers could be interpreted either way, even though the weight of the evidence had been totally on the side of God.
2. Those reverend inquisitors from headquarters commanded such an extraordinary sway over these simple Galileans that it left them the more easy dupes of this haughty and dogmatic, however false, calumny. But while none dared stand and raise his voice against that hideous blasphemy, Jesus needed no human backing to shatter it to smithereens!

2. JEALOUS PHARISEES COUNTERATTACK, ASSERTING JESUS' WORKS DONE BY DEVIL'S POWER (12:24)

12:24 **But when the Pharisees heard it.** Mark (3:22) calls them "scribes from Jerusalem," so the pressure is on. (Cf. Mt. 15:1=Mk. 7:1) Judging from their pontifical attitude, they are an official investigating committee sent out to examine the claims of any popular leader. (Cf. Jn. 1:19)

But when the Pharisees heard what the crowds were beginning to say, they knew that this young Rabbi's popular movement was getting out of hand and that He must be stopped immediately,

publicly and finally. But how? Grasping for straws and without a moment's reflection, they spat out their abuse: "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of demons." Later, disenchanted people jeer similar abuse. (Jn. 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20) Had they reflected upon the logical implications of this statement, they might have sought something a bit more substantial, since the Lord easily mows down their argument. Did the Pharisees themselves believe this calumny? Two views are offered:

1. It was a clever, desperate lie and they knew it to be false when they said it.
2. They were psychologically and ethically incapable of discerning where truth lay: they mistook good for evil, God for the devil.

Beelzebub (cf. Mk. 3:22: "He has Beelzebub in him!" and Mk. 3:30: "He has an unclean spirit." Cf. Mt. 10:25) The charges are two: (1) that He is Himself demon-possessed, and (2) that He performs miracles in collaboration with the demon prince. The first charge is an attack on His sanity, since "he has a demon" is not intended to affirm actual demon-possession, but is the affirmation that the person so labelled acts as if he were, hence, must be dismissed as mad. (Cf. Mt. 11:18; Jn. 7:20; 8:48, 49, 52; 10:20) This does not mean, however, that the Jews mistook mere insanity for demon-possession. Rather, on the contrary, their harsh experiences with demon-possession gave them a terribly cutting metaphor to hurl at anyone they wished to put down or put away as insane. Whether or not the Pharisees sincerely thought Jesus to be the walking embodiment of Satan when they snarled "He has Beelzebub," is not the point, for it is an old trick to turn public opinion away from a would-be leader by asserting his insanity. The second charge, and by far the more serious, is that of a secret pact with Satan. And that it is with Satan and no lesser demon that they charge His allegiance and alliance, is amply proved by Jesus' answers in which He shifts easily from *Beelzebub* to Satan without any conscious change of subject. (See on 12:26, 27)

Note carefully the Pharisees' wording: "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub . . ." Let it be noted with A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, ad loc.) that the various opinions offered to explain Jesus (that He was mad, that He was the Messiah or in league with Satan, even Herod's view that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead) merely prove the reality of Jesus' ministry of miracles. None doubted the reality of His works, even though they chose to place a different construction on them. How these scribes would gladly have cried, "He casts out no demons whatsoever!"

But the undeniable nature of the facts drove them to concoct a hypothesis that would attempt to undermine the importance of the fact.

But beyond their obvious professional jealousy, what is the rationale behind this slander which makes it even half palatable to men who by virtue of their training and position were no fools?

1. The logical rationale may be stated thus: "The prince of demons obliges Jesus by recalling the demons from their victims whenever Jesus wishes it." What they are saying is not at all impossible, since Satan can empower human servants to work miracles. (2 Th. 2:9, 10; Mt. 24:24) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 107) thinks that

The assertion, if believed by the people, would not only have destroyed their confidence in the divine mission of Jesus, but it would have established in the place of it the injurious supposition of a league with Satan. It derived great plausibility from the consideration, that as there were at least two powers by which demons might be cast out, and as both were invisible, it might appear impossible to decide whether it was the power of God or the power of Satan. The Pharisees thought that they had advanced an explanation which, whether true or false, Jesus could not clearly disprove . . .

2. The moral rationale is best stated by Edersheim (*Life*, I, 574)

It could no longer be denied that miracles were wrought by Jesus. At least, what to *us* seem miracles, yet not to them, since "miraculous" cures and the expelling of demons lay within the sphere of their "extraordinary ordinary"—were not miracles in our sense, since they were, or professed to be, done by their "own children." The mere fact, therefore, of such cures would present no difficulty to them. To *us* a single well-ascertained miracle would form irrefragable evidence of the claims of Christ; to *them* it would not. They could believe in the "miracles," yet not in the Christ. To them the question would not be, as to us, whether they were miracles—but, By what power, or in what Name, He did these deeds? From our standpoint, their opposition to the Christ would—in view of His miracles—seem not only wicked, but rationally inexplicable. But ours was not

their point of view. And here again, we perceive that it was enmity to the *Person* and *Teaching* of Jesus which led to the denial of His claims. The inquiry: By what Power Jesus did these works? they met by the assertion, that it was through that of Satan, or the Chief of the Demons. . . . All this, because the Kingdom which He came to open and which He preached, was precisely the opposite of what they regarded as the Kingdom of God. Thus it was the essential contrariety of Rabbinism to the Gospel of the Christ that lay at the foundation of their conduct towards the Person of Christ. We venture to assert that this accounts for the whole after-history up to the Cross. Thus viewed, the history of the Pharisaic opposition appears not only consistent, but is, so to speak, morally accounted for . . . their deeds being evil. Once arrived at the conclusion, that the miracles which Christ did were due to the power of Satan, and that He was the representative of the Evil One, their course was rationally and morally chosen. To regard every fresh manifestation of Christ's power as only a fuller development of the power of Satan, and to oppose it with increasing determination and hostility, even to the Cross: such was henceforth the natural progress of this history.

B. JESUS' BASIC REBUTTAL (12:25-37)

1. SATAN IS DIVIDED AGAINST HIMSELF: GOOD! (12:25, 26)

Study Jesus' procedure in making this answer:

1. He surrounded Himself deliberately with Pharisees, in order to deal with their slander to their face. (Mk. 3:23)
2. He runs together three well-known and easily admitted illustrations of internal dissention producing weakness and precipitating a fatal crisis: divided kingdoms, cities and homes.
3. He drives home the application to Satan's case.

12:25 **And knowing their thoughts he said unto them** (Cf. Mt. 9:4; Mk. 2:8; Lk. 6:8; 9:47) He discerns not merely what they had said, for it would require little of anyone to overhear the words murmured by the scribes for the ears of everyone who might be swayed by the dangerous opinion that Jesus of Nazareth might

somehow be the Messiah. He read their **thoughts** (*enthumēseis*), those secret deliberations of their minds that motivated their words.

Did the Pharisees' really believe that Satan could be so stupid as to combat his own best interests by aiding Jesus to destroy his own influence exercised in and through the demons? Or was this not rather just an error in their thinking that they committed without really being committed to the necessary conclusion to which their assertions must lead? He who is grasping desperately for proof in an uneven debate does not often have time to assess the absurd ramifications that a certain position must take. However, it is true that "evil is the ultimate folly," and, in the long view, Satan is the biggest fool, because he has rejected the wisdom and reality of God's moral government of the universe. Thus, once admitted the conclusion that Jesus is not of God, a position held by these scribes, it was an easy step to conclude that the usually very crafty Satan could perhaps have been napping intellectually when he empowers Jesus to destroy the hold of his own demons. Or, perhaps they thought that he could deceive people by seeming to perform in God's name miracles that were actually Satan's doing. And if "evil be the ultimate folly," who can say that the Pharisees themselves, because of the arrogant tenacity with which they adhered to their false notions, and by which they pursued their evil course, could actually reason correctly? Even if their reasoning is correct, they were wrong, since Jesus' helping God by bringing internal dissension to Satan's ranks, really meant the victory of God's Kingdom anyway.

Jesus' argument which reveals the foolishness involved in their suggestion:

Major premise: Any organization, divided against itself, will fall.

Minor premise: Satan is divided against himself.

Conclusion: Therefore, his organization will fall.

Rather than make His conclusion explicit by stating it, Jesus frames it into a question which neither the Pharisees or anyone else were qualified to answer: **How then shall his kingdom stand?** How indeed? This leads us to see that Jesus puts beyond doubt the fact that Satan cannot afford such luxuries as the internal strife which the Pharisees unwittingly attribute to him by their bad logic. Satan could not tactically tolerate nor practically permit the casting out of his minions, for, either way, he loses. If he permits or empowers Jesus to exorcize demons, he loses control over the victims, and Jesus gains a popular pulpit from which to trumpet His message of the near

arrival of God's Kingdom. The constant and vigorous proclamation of God's rule on earth would be a strange platform indeed from which to mount an insidious, diabolical counteroffensive against God!

None can deny the real, inner discord that reigns in Satan's kingdom, but this, of course, cannot refer to a complete break or a total self-annihilation through civil war among the demons. While each part of Satan's realm is really mutually contradictory and contrary to every other part, yet, in relation to God's Kingdom, the powers of darkness are united and solidly against God's rule. It is upon this fundamental, unified antagonism to God's reign on the part of all of Satan's servants, that Jesus founds His argument.

No passage could more clearly teach that the reign of evil in the universe has a personal, malevolent chief who functions as a polarizing force that unites every other force into its common rebellion against the rule of God. But this text heralds also the final defeat of that dark ruler. Here in a few words is the final rebuttal to that dualism that insists that there are two equally powerful forces in the universe, one infinitely good, the other infinitely evil, that decide the fates of man. Jesus' insistence upon the impossibility of stability amidst internal strife applies with equal force to God's Kingdom too: if God fights the god of this world as an equal, the strife could conceivably wreck the universe. But God recognizes no equals, much less Satan! (Cf. Isa. 42:8; 43:10-13; 44:6, 8; 45:18, 21-23; 46:9)

2. WHAT ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS WHO EXORCIZE DEMONS?

(12:27)

12:27 **And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges. Your sons** is not likely the physical offspring of the Pharisees, but rather refers to someone of whom the Pharisees could say no evil and whom they publicly approved as experts in demon-exorcism. **Sons**, taken Hebraistically, suggests that they were their disciples. Is this an obscure reference to exorcists similar to those described by Luke (Acts 19:13, 14) and by Josephus (*Antiquities*, VIII, 2, 5; *Wars*, VII, 6, 3)? Two views have been entertained concerning the activity of these **sons** of the Pharisees:

1. They really exorcized demons by God's power.
 - a. Lenski (*Matthew*, 478) uncovers the force of Jesus' argument:

The fact that Satan neither could nor would lend himself to such expulsions, v. 25, 26 have put beyond

question. Whoever drives out devils can do so only in the necessary connection with God. What a desperate self-contradiction, therefore, to claim that when Jesus drives out devils, this is done in connection with *Satan*; but when their own experts drive them out, this is done in connection with God! Something is viciously wrong with men who ascribe the identical effect to absolutely opposite causes.

- b. In favor of this view is the present indicative verb "(they) are casting out" (*ekballousin*). (Or is this a gnomic present, i.e. one which speaks only of what is thought to happen in general, without deciding whether the action involved is real or not?) It must not be argued, however, that such a concession on the part of Jesus would somehow invalidate the uniqueness of Jesus' miracles, simply because He acknowledged the exorcism of demons by Jewish exorcists, any more than that the Exodus narrative justifies Egyptian magic in competition with the genuine miracles of Moses, merely because Exodus records these feats of magic. (Cf. Ex. 7:8—8:18)
 - c. And if they really exorcized spirits by God's power, then the same explanations that described their activity could well be true of Him as well. (That those exorcists might have actually worked miracles by God's power may be suggested by the realization that God could easily have done so in order to give merciful relief to the suffering victims, despite the inadequacy of the understanding of the Jewish exorcist whose prayers and incantations were mistakenly thought to be the effective cause. This, because God has never promised to limit His goodness to "the righteous," and His Son clearly proved God's concern for the desperately mistaken. (Mt. 5:44, 45; Lk. 6:35, 36)
 - d. So, for these reasons, these Pharisean experts who labored to exorcize demons by the exercise of divine power would be in a position to convict their own teachers of injustice.
2. These exorcists only appear to exorcize demons, but they really did what they did either by use of human psychology or by use of Satan's means and power. This becomes an argument by concession: "Granted for sake of argument that your students actually exorcize demons . . ."

- a. It may be that these experimental practitioners among the Pharisees worked in much the same manner in which the exorcists, mentioned by Luke and Josephus, expelled demons, i.e. by magical formulas or incantations, the use of talismans and perhaps direct witchcraft. (See *ISBE*, 1067b; cf. Tobias 6:1—8:3)
 - b. If this is the case, then Jesus would be arguing, "Would you dare assert that your experts cast out demons using the indubitable methods of the living God and not rather the methods suggested by clever men trying to do this without God's help? Those experts, against which you can say no wrong, are using methods other than the unquestionable power of God. And since you affirm that these actually exercise a spiritual power upon the demons, and since you know that there are only two such powers, and since you cannot attribute their activities to that of God, you must admit that their methods and power is of Satan! What objection can you possibly make to MY doing so (for you say I use Satan's power), when those whom you approve do the same? They will unmask the injustice of your accusations, for by blaming me, you blame them too!"
 - c. This view of the question has the weakness of not really advancing Jesus' cause by producing another objective argument, since this view tends merely to see a tension created by Jesus between the Pharisees and their own disciples.
 - d. Further, our ignorance of the actual methods or success of these Pharisean exorcists does not permit us to dogmatize on their connections either with God or Satan.
3. Either way, Jesus had them trapped:
- a. "If by your own definitions Satan empowers your disciples, they will condemn you, for they would never willingly attribute their pretended success to his power. And yet they cannot, as do I, cast out demons by the simple exercise of a single word of authority, or they would be noted for their miracles as am I."
 - b. "If God, by your calculation, empowers your disciples, then you must prove that they have some better claim to God's help than do I. Since they dare not pretend so much, else

they would come forward to challenge my labors, they shall decide whether my work is God's or demonic."

3. REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE: GOD'S SPIRIT EMPOWERS ME. (12:28)

12:28 **But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.** Luke has "finger of God" (Lk. 11:20; cf. Ex. 8:19; Dt. 9:10) Here in the protasis we have an implicit explanation of His mysterious power: **I cast out demons by the Spirit of God.** This is the reason why Jesus sounds the dreadful alarm (12:32) against blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. While it will be seen that the attribution of Jesus' miracles to Satanic influence is not the only way to blaspheme the Spirit, it is certain that the rejection of Jesus' alternative reflects a distorted bent of mind that would drive a man sooner or later to reject whatever evidence God offers him through the Spirit whether before or after Pentecost.

Implicit in this alternative is the dilemma universally recognized by the Pharisees: "Either He expels demons by God's power or by collusion with Satan." Jesus had just eliminated the second alternative as logically absurd. (12:25-27) The critics are left with the only other possible alternate explanation: "The Spirit employed by Jesus cannot be that malignant demon but must be God's." And, if so, the divine authority of everything He was saying was thereby vindicated, especially what He had so insistently preached about the near approach of God's Kingdom.

Then is the kingdom of God come upon you. This is not merely an interesting, academic alternative: it is a direct, ominous warning that they have just been confronted with the presence and power of the rule of God Himself! And, since they had deliberately and maliciously attacked Him Who in the human form represented that God they profess to serve, they were caught in open rebellion against the King of heaven and earth. Because in their view the coming of the Kingdom of God and the arrival of the Messiah must occur simultaneously, there is also implied in this statement the reality that Jesus Himself is the Messiah and King of the Kingdom which they had so grossly insulted. But these Pharisees, blinded by their own views as to what the coming Messianic Kingdom must be, could not recognize in the ministry of Jesus the obvious signs of its beginning. (Cf. Lk. 17:20, 21 where they were still asking for a time schedule, since they could not visualize anything so inward, so spiritual as the rule of God by means of a spiritual government right

in their midst.) These theological doctors could only rock back on their heels with tongue in cheek and raised eyebrows, smirking, "What kind of a kingdom do you think YOU represent? certainly not the great messianic reign that WE anticipate!"

Then is the kingdom . . . come upon you. (*phithano*, Arndt-Gingrich, 864: "(1) come before, precede; (2) be just arrived, then simply, arrive, come; (3) come up to, attain to." The Lord is not here discussing the (then) future appearance of God's reign in and through the Church, which was the object of much of His preaching. Instead, He refers to the even then tangible evidences that fairly shouted for all to hear that God was taking over from Satan! Satan is being bound even now! Instead of complaining about Jesus' successes, these very Pharisees should have led the whole Jewish nation in festal rejoicing in their glorious good fortune to be able to live to see the very realization of all that their religion had prepared them for.

4. TO OVERPOWER SATAN, ONE MUST BE STRONGER THAN HE. (12:29)

12:29 This simple, clear illustration is easily visualized by anyone who knows what it would require to plunder the house of the strong. Jesus intended to do two things regarding Satan:

1. Bind the strong man

- a. By His perfect submission to the will of the Father, Jesus had been tying Satan's hands ever since the beginning of His ministry. (Mt. 4:1-11) Since Jesus refused to indulge Himself along the lines suggested by Satan, the tempter found himself completely helpless, because the devil could not force Jesus to sin. By staying well within the will of God for man, Jesus was perfectly protected by the power of God that obliged Satan to respect those limits.
- b. But in this context, Jesus' argument assumes the fact that Satan has already been defeated, because His own miracles prove it. That is, if Jesus has already triumphed over demons, it is proof that He had defeated their master as well. Those Pharisees were standing in the presence of the Conqueror and Destroyer of Satan's dominion! But in what sense and at what time did Jesus bind Satan?
 - (1) In the absolute sense, he had not done so at that moment, since Satan continued to attack Him again and continues to harrass His disciples.

- (2) Therefore, Jesus must mean that Satan was bound only in the sense that he stood helpless to hinder every single victory that Jesus wrought over his realm, whether in demon-expulsion or in making physically right all that sin and disease had distorted.

2. **Spoil his house. Spoil his goods** (*tà skeuē autoū harpāsai*) could perhaps be better rendered "steal his instruments, his vessels, his goods" so that the language may more clearly refer to the poor wretches who had served as his vessels. (Cf. Ac. 26:18; 1 Jn. 3:8; 2 Tim. 2:26; Col. 1:13) The fact that Jesus had already begun His victorious liberation movement to set the prisoners free, proves that He had already successfully bound their lord. Though Jesus states this as a logical necessity, His miracles demonstrated beyond all doubt that He was doing what He here claims.

The reason the Son of God came into the world was to destroy the works of the devil! (1 Jn. 3:8; cf. also Col. 2:15; 1 Jn. 4:4) So, His argument is: "By the very fact that I am doing my best to unchain a demoniac enslaved to Satan, I prove myself to be his enemy. By succeeding I prove myself his Master!"

5. WARNING: NEUTRALITY IS IMPOSSIBLE (12:30)

12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. This text is not to be confused with Mk. 9:38-40 or Lk. 9:49, 50 nor thought to be the contradictory of them. In those texts the Lord provides a rule whereby a disciple is to judge another (with humility and tolerance), whereas here He provides the test whereby a disciple may judge himself (with strict intolerance). (See Plummer, *Luke*, 259f.) Whereas this terse axiom simply means to say "Neutrality is impossible," several knotty problems arise regarding its application: to whom does Jesus address these words: to the Pharisees? or to the undecided crowds? To what does He refer: His relation to Satan or the relation of every man to truth?

1. **His relation to Satan.** This view sees Jesus as only now concluding His argument regarding His true relation to Satan: "Satan, instead of helping me as you say, fights my ministry! He definitely does NOT remain neutral or take my part. I could wish that you could see the intensification of his efforts to thwart me at every turn! Could you but see what I know from repeated personal combat with this Liar, Murderer

and Accuser, you would never have so carelessly suggested that my powers are to be explained by some supposed, secret pact with him!" Morgan (*Matthew*, 130) has it this way:

(Jesus) had cast the demon out of a man and so had gathered him back into unified and balanced life, had gathered him back to His family, and to the family of God. It was Satan that had scattered, . . . spoiled. . . . Do not confuse the Person Who stands at the centre of the gathering force with the person who stands at the center of the scattering force.

If one man gathers what another scatters and vice versa, it should be clear that their goals are completely at odds. This utter diversity of aims should prove that Satan and Jesus have nothing in common.

2. His appeal to the undecided in this audience. If this thrust expresses His intended application, then He insists that no one can remain neutral when right and truth can be known. An agnostic mentality, in the presence of the positive, beneficial evidence of my true identity demonstrated by my miracles, is to align oneself with my enemy: there is no middle ground.
 - a. Lenski (*Matthew*, 481) thinks that Jesus now switches from objective to subjective argument here, having sufficiently dealt with the truly antithetic positions of Satan and Himself.
 - b. But were the Pharisees endeavoring to maintain a neutralist posture at this time? Evidence against this is their regular convocations to deliberate the right means of eliminating Jesus. (Cf. Mt. 12:14 and parallels; Jn. 5:18; 7:7) They might be feigning a neutrality they do not feel, merely to pretend, in the presence of the crowds at least, objectivity as they examine this upstart Rabbi and to render a carefully deliberated judgment.
 - c. But if the Pharisees are not to be thought of as attempting a mediating position, reserving judgment until all the evidence is weighed, then Jesus is to be seen as directing this warning at the uncommitted crowds. This stern warning admonishes the undecided to make up their mind about Jesus. The highest degree of psychological probability lies behind their uncertainty, since their new-found appreciation of Jesus (12:23) now demands of them an

open repudiation of leaders that had long held their esteem for their prodigious learning. To this hesitating multitude, frustrated by its own indecision, Jesus launches this warning:

- (1) The Pharisees, as a group, are far from being neutral or objective. They do not have eyes for truth wherever it might be found.
- (2) Anyone who shares this mentality is really opposed to me. Any who accept my message and my authority must break with that mentality.
- (3) *Therefore, choose!*

It is not necessary to the sense to discover what it is that each **gathers** or **scatters**, for there is enough antithetical tension in the simple sense of each verb to prove the diametrically opposed purposes of those engaged in either activity.

C. JESUS EXPANDS HIS WARNING AGAINST BLASPHEMY OF THE SPIRIT (12:31, 32)

1. ALL SINS FORGIVEABLE, EXCEPT THAT WHICH REJECTS THE MEANS BY WHICH ALL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S TRUTH AND FORGIVENESS IS COMMUNICATED, I.E. BY HIS SPIRIT.

12:31 **Therefore I say unto you.** **Therefore** (*διὰ τοῦτο*: "on account of this," or, "for this reason") is the conclusion based on what reason: on account of this what?

1. Immediate context: "Since neutrality regarding Jesus is impossible due to the fact that he who is not with Him automatically declares himself against Him. . . ." Because of this mindset in those who were against Jesus, it would be patently impossible for the Holy Spirit to bring enough convicting evidence that would lead men to submit to Jesus as Lord.
2. Larger context. The terrible warning Jesus now utters is occasioned; not only or merely because of the impossibility of neutrality (although this too is involved), but because they had said at the very outset of this debate "He is possessed by Beelzebul;" (Mk. 3:22) and "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow casts out demons." (Mt. 12:24) This is probably the better interpretation, being confirmed as it is by Mark's explanation of the same ominous forewarning: "for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (Mk. 3:30)

That this is truly Mark's explanation of the occasion

of this unusually severe utterance, and not part of the warning itself, is demonstrated by three suggestive approaches:

- a. Mark's citation of Jesus' words abruptly changes from first and second persons to third, i.e. from "I say to you" to "for they had said, 'He has . . .'" This change of persons, admittedly, could be taken as an aside uttered to His disciples in which the Lord quotes accurately what the Pharisees were muttering, without turning their words into first person, as we do in English: "for they said, 'I have an unclean spirit.'" The change of persons alone is not decisive.
- b. Mark's writing switches from direct quotation (vv. 28, 29) to simple narration. Mark does not, like Matthew, intend to include other material on this same subject at this time. Rather, since he will move immediately to the next episode, it will be seen that he inserted this brief word which at once justifies the unusual harshness of Jesus' warning and concludes the incident.
- c. Mark is therefore not attempting to define the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, thus limiting it to the accusing Jesus of alliance with demons. Rather, we should notice that his scope is larger. Mark would show the brilliance and completeness of his Master's handling of two very delicate situations in which Jesus is being opposed in one way or another:
 - (1) Mk. 3:21: "for they were saying, 'He is beside Himself.'" (*élegon gàr hóti exéstē*).
 - (2) Mk. 3:30: "for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (*élegon pneúma akátharton echei*).

So the reason for what follows lies in the fact that the Pharisees were so very close to blaspheming the Holy Spirit, if they had not already done so, not merely because they gave the wrong explanation of Jesus' miracles, but because they had for so many years before deliberately shut their eyes and ears to God and so long resisted submission to being taught by Him, that when they met Him in this direct confrontation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, they could not recognize

Him. Rather, their habitual insensitivity to God automatically led them to discount everything God was saying through Jesus. It is no wonder that Jesus repeatedly scored them both publicly and privately for their moral insensitivity and deliberate resistance. (Cf. Mt. 23; 16:5-12)

Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven: what glorious news! In our efforts to find the elusive meaning of the unforgiveable sin, we trample down this astounding announcement! **Every sin**, no matter how heinous, **every blasphemy**, even those vicious, mocking words hurled directly at God or that spiteful spitting upon all that God calls holy, can and **shall be forgiven**. Trumpet this news down into the self-imposed dungeons of those hopeless souls whose ritual of self-accusation has them spell-bound into believing that for them there can be no hope or forgiveness! And, when Mark (3:28) cites Jesus as adding: "whatever blasphemies they utter," he seems to be searching for the vilest sin to which man can stoop. Not that sins may be catalogued as "mortal and venial," but since man would naturally understand crime against God as the most serious, Jesus includes the foulest blasphemies of which the human heart is capable: "Yes, even this shall be forgiven!" It is not within the purpose of Jesus at this point to outline the terms by which this forgiveness may be obtained, this latter revelation remaining for future messages to clarify. But the usual blasphemies and sins may be forgiven, because, by their nature, they do not make repentance impossible. (Cf. Isa. 1:18) Who cannot rejoice here? (Micah 7:18)

But the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. To the above-stated general principle, Jesus attaches one all-important amendment. There are two ways to consider this exception:

1. Is this a sin which is only one of an infinitely long list of relatively similar sins? Apparently not, because the Lord throws this particular sin into contrast with **every (other) sin and blasphemy**.
2. Or is this a sin which is so fundamental that it potentially touches, affects and includes all the others, so that to fail in regard to it is to cut oneself off from all possibility of forgiveness for all the others? It is that moral perverseness that, in full knowledge of the good, calls good evil and evil good. It takes an unforgiveably wicked mind to ascribe evil to someone whose work and teaching stand only on the side of righteousness and merciful helpfulness to sinful, suffering humanity. Since these fruits of His life are the proof of God's Spirit at work through Him, to slander the Spirit's gifts and power,

contrary to what one's own mind must recognize as from God, is evidence of the deepest perversity, the display of an incredible maliciousness.

Why is this sin so inexorably unforgiveable? Simply because a man in this frame of mind just cannot repent. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 49) explains something of this impossibility:

If a man cannot recognize the good when he sees it, he cannot desire the good. If a man does not recognize the evil as being evil, he cannot be sorry for it, hate it and wish to depart from it.

But what is involved here is not the native ability or inability to discern evil, but the gradually developed unwillingness to be able to see truth as truth, good as good and evil as evil.

12:32 **And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him.** Even the very people responsible for Jesus' death are described as having done it "in ignorance!" (Cf. Ac. 3:17; 13:27; 1 Co. 2:8; Lk. 23:34; 1 Tim. 1:13). Even though the sins of ignorance are still culpable. (Cf. Lev. 5:17-19) God did not overlook them. But how is it possible for Jesus here to pronounce forgivable what is said against Himself, whereas the Apostles later would reserve to the hottest hell anyone who dared speak against Jesus? (Cf. Heb. 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:22, 23; 4:2; 5:10-12; Jude 4; 1 Co. 16:22!)

1. Jesus recognizes the facility with which men misunderstand the true nature of what appears to the Jews as a mere human messenger but in reality is God Himself in human dress. Incarnation is a unique experience, so unique, in fact, that He admits that a man could possibly be scandalized by His humanness, as if He were but another rabbi, or, at best, another prophet. Though the seemingly human Messenger (Jesus Himself) might be open to misconstruction, God's Spirit at work on men's conscience would not be hampered by this impediment of incarnation. Hence to reject wilfully what must be the admission of one's own heart under conviction by what one knows of God's message must be utterly unforgiveable.
2. The Apostles say what they do during the unique era of the Holy Spirit's ministry. Since it was the Spirit's specific mission to glorify Jesus, anyone who rejected His testimony to Jesus thus turned his back upon the Spirit's best efforts to save him. So the Apostles warn that to reject Jesus or His message is to perish! So the apparent contradiction is resolved by

distinguishing the dispensations under which each declaration was made.

Blasphemy against the Spirit . . . speak against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy is that speaking against someone or something with malicious intent, or the defamation of what is holy, good or noble. While it is true that every sin, whatever its specific character, tends toward blasphemy, because of that rebellious heart that wants to be its own master and is willing thus to deny and crush all authority but its own self-rule, and while every blasphemy of what is holy tends toward the defamation of Him who makes it holy, i.e. the Holy Spirit, because of that bent of mind that calls evil good and good evil, still Jesus is warning of a line which, if crossed, leaves no room for pardon, because repentance has then become a psychological impossibility. Along that line that approaches the point of impardonability are other sins dreadfully near in character to **blasphemy against the Spirit**: quenching the Spirit (1 Th. 5:19), grieving the Spirit (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30), resisting Him (Ac. 7:51). In none of these cases is found the dire warning against committing sin for which there is no expiation, as is found in passages which thunder their warnings against that haughty trampling upon God's most strenuous efforts to save man. (Cf. Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31) These sins are not so very far apart, however, since, in the wider sense, every sin of the believer who has experienced the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, may be called a sin against the Holy Spirit. But these sins against His influences in the life of the believer, while potentially leading man to harden himself enough to want to blaspheme against the Spirit, still are not unpardonable, for, otherwise, who could be saved?

But **blasphemy**, or also, **speaking against the Holy Spirit** is the grave danger it is, for this is the external evidence that the individual has been committed to this unwillingness to repent for some time. The grave danger, of which this utterance is but the outward proof, is that bent of mind that has long before chosen not to recognize truth and goodness when it is encountered. As Jesus says next (Mt. 12:35), **blasphemy against the Spirit**, spoken by the lips, is but the true product of the heart. What was the person's mentality will finally come out in his talk. There is a serious, public commitment of oneself to that position already taken in his heart, for, whereas his indifference to truth and goodness had become more or less to be suspected, the unblushing maliciousness of his words not only commits him publicly to his damnable stand, but shows others

what he had been thinking privately for quite some time before he arrived at that moment. Viewed in this light, the sin against the Holy Spirit is, as Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 49) describes it:

If a man for long enough shuts his eyes and ears to God's way, and takes his own way, if he for long enough refuses to listen to the guidance God is offering him, if he for long enough turns his back upon the messages which God is sending him, if he for long enough prefers his own human ideas to the ideas which God seeks to put into his mind, then in the end he comes to a stage when he cannot recognize God's truth . . . beauty and goodness when he sees them. He comes to a stage when his own evil seems to him good, and when God's good seems to him evil.

Speak against the Spirit. There have been disciples of the Lord who have insisted upon a resurgence of miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit's activity as evidence of the real government of God. They feel that this would serve concretely as scientific proof to an agnostic world that these modern Christians are really the bearers of the divine message. Classic Christianity, on the other hand, has rightly affirmed the adequacy of the proofs once for all given by the Apostles and early believers to support the divine origin of their message. Once vindicated as from God, the message needed no continual propping up with continued miracles. Nevertheless, in contrast to this, sincere disciples urge a resurrection of "Pentecostal power", and insist that any who cannot speak in tongues (ironically chosen by many though not all as the unique sign of the Spirit's presence) are somehow inferior Christians. Rather than listen to the message of the Spirit that leads to real repentance and transformation of life, deeper love for ignorant and imperfect brethren and longsuffering patience and a greater constancy, these disciples tend to spend energy and time promoting the external forms of the Spirit's manifestation of the first century. As a reaction against this warped understanding of the Spirit's word, other Christians, who do not share this view, attribute the so-called "manifestations of the Spirit", cited by modern "Pentecostals", to forces other than the genuine power of God. (The power of one's own spirit through self-hypnosis, demonic activity, etc. are mentioned as explanations.) Chagrined, the modern charismatics feel that this accusation is to **speak against the Spirit**. Both sides need to beware lest the one attribute God's real activity in the modern world to Satan and lest the other mistake freaks of their own minds or actual demonic activity for God's leadership. Both sides must

recognize their own need for patient love and generous consideration of the weaknesses of the other, since these attitudes ARE the undoubted fruit of the Spirit. While it is this author's opinion that God may work many true modern miracles through leaders of any denomination, either out of mercy in answer to their prayers and to convince them of His love despite their ignorance and imperfection (Cf. Mt. 5:45), or because He desires to test the loyalty of His own people whether they will follow Him alone or not (Cf. Deut. 13:1-5), the *likelihoood* of repeated manifestations of the Spirit's special gifts is small due to their nature and purpose. (See my article "Miracles" in this volume.) As a result, to object to the unfortunate conclusions of convinced charismatics (or those who suppose themselves such) is not to **speak against the Spirit**, but rather to "try the spirits" whether they be of God.

Not forgiven . . . neither in this world, nor in that which is to come. Should the explanation of this sin be based on the interpretation placed on the phrases **in this world** and **that to come**?

1. It is true that the word **world** (*aióni*) is susceptible of being translated *age*, in the sense of "dispensation, epoch, era." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 26, 27)
 - a. Accordingly, we should interpret, according to this view, *this age* in reference to the pre-Messianic or Jewish period, and *the coming one* in reference to the age of the Messiah, or Christian epoch.
 - b. But the alternative explanation, **neither in this world** bounded by time and space, **nor in the coming world**, as limitless as eternity itself, covers practically the same ground, since
 - (1) **this world** includes both Jewish and Christian dispensations;
 - (2) furthermore, there is no opportunity to repent nor any further provision of grace between the present age and eternity wherein forgiveness could be granted;
 - (3) the distinction of the Jewish age from the Christian makes no practical difference anyway, since, if a man is not forgiven as a Jew nor as a Christian, to what could he possibly appeal? The Jewish age flowed right into the Christian dispensation which will halt only for judgment and, after that, eternity.

2. Further evidence that the division of **this world** and the **coming one** into Jewish and Christian ages is a false one, is to be seen in the fact that there is no record of an exception made either by Christ or the Apostles whereby they limited the universality of their Gospel invitations. So far as the record goes, none ever excluded any individual who, in any time previous to their presenting themselves as candidates for conversion, had blasphemed the Holy Spirit. But the problem arises, would any who had really blasphemed the Spirit present himself as a candidate for baptism? (Study Ac. 7:51ff.)
3. Additional evidence against this distinction of Jewish and Christian epochs is to be found in the specific announcement by Jesus that **every sin and blasphemy** (against the Father) and **whosoever speaks against the Son shall be forgiven**. Now, if **this world** means that the Jewish age, an age in which Jesus was being spoken against and in which He was ultimately crucified, then a man who blasphemed the Holy Spirit at work in Jesus through His miracles and His God-inspired message (cf. 12:28), could both have and not have forgiveness, which is a manifest self-contradiction.
4. **This world** and the **world to come** is NT language for
 - a. **This era of human history bounded by time and space** plagued by cares. (Mk. 10:30a; Lk. 16:8; 18:30a; 20:34; Eph. 1:21a; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12; Mt. 13:22, 39)
 - b. The post-judgment era as unlimited as eternity (Mk. 10:30b; Lk. 18:30b; 20:35; Eph. 1:21b; 1 Tim. 6:19?; Heb. 6:5)

So, Jesus says that this sin will absolutely never be forgiven. It is difficult to imagine how He could have stated the eternity of future punishment in more unequivocal terms! Lenski (*Matthew*, 483) is right to observe that:

Jesus is warning the Pharisees who had never believed in him. Hence the sin against the Holy Ghost may be committed, not only by former believers . . . but also by men who have never believed.

Neither in **this world** nor in **that to come**, taken in reference to this unforgiveable sin, must not be supposed to suggest that for other lesser sins, forgiveness might yet be hoped for, if not now, perhaps after death. There is no purgatory or second hope of grace

for those who die without pardon. Jesus' expression intends only to reinforce the absolute hopelessness of the person who blasphemes God's Spirit. (Cf. Lk. 16:26; Heb. 3:13; 9:27; Gal. 6:7) From the foregoing passages it is clear that death without pardon merely fixes a soul's destiny and teaches that everything depends upon the choices man has made in this life.

Even the Mosaic economy distinguished between unintentional and deliberate sin. (Cf. Nu. 15:22-30) For the former, forgiveness was possible; for the latter, nothing but extermination was prescribed: "because he despised the word of Jehovah, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him." (Cf. 1 Sam. 2:25; 3:14; Isa. 22:14)

2. ETERNAL DAMNATION AWAITS THE SINNER WHO REJECTS ALL THAT IS THE SPIRIT'S WORK AMONG MEN.

a. One key to understanding this sin against the Spirit is the question: What is the Holy Spirit's work? When did it begin?

- (1) It began primarily at Pentecost after Jesus' earthly message and work were fully completed. (Ac. 1:7, 8; 2; Jn. 16:7-14; 15:16, 17, 26)
- (2) It consisted in glorifying Jesus and revealing God's will through the Apostles' words and works. (Jn. 15:26; 16:13-15; Mt. 10:19, 20)
- (3) It consisted of convincing the world of its sin, its need of righteousness and the reality of judgment. (Jn. 16:7-11) It consisted in leading men to repentance. Thus to blaspheme Him is to put the sinner in an attitude so hardened as to render repentance absolutely impossible, because he mentally sets his will against the Spirit's appeals.
- (4) It consisted in making men holy, like God. It becomes a deliberate insult to God for men to claim to be unable to distinguish His work from that vileness and spiritual rotteness produced by that unclean spirit which is the antithesis of all that God stands for! That immoral pretense to be unable to discern lasting good in the feeblest efforts of God's human agents and institutions, however imperfect and ineffectual they may seem, is a mindset that calls good evil and evil good. This is the damnation of agnosticism and of those skeptics that pretend to be quite unable to make

a firm decision for truth and righteousness. Even though some of them admit the rightness of God's standards, they see much unholiness and unrighteousness in the Church, as judged by the Church's own ideals, but they do not commit themselves to those ideals nor preach them in the unselfish endeavor to bring every man up to the unbesmirched standard they pretend to honor. The end result is their rejecting as unworthy of their higher intelligence the only work and wisdom which is capable of bringing them to ultimate reality: God's.

- b. **Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit**, then, consists in the final and complete rejection of all that the Holy Spirit has used to bring man to repentance: the Scripture which is His own written message and the Church which is His living voice in the world. (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:19—4:11; 6:4-8; 1 Co. 10:1-13; Jn. 15:1-5; Eph. 3:10) It is the final and complete suppressing of all that one's own conscience, however enlightened by the revelation of God it might have been, would have the man do. This sin is not one single act, nor merely backsliding followed by repentance, but rather that final, complete and perpetual rejection and opposition to the Spirit's message which is the expression of a mind willfully shut to God's proffered mercy. (Cf. Lk. 12:8-10; Heb. 10:26-31)

Contrary to the opinion of some, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not only possible in the present age, but also much more likely and common, since prejudices against the Spirit's influence in one's life, and superficial sophistication that close haughty eyes to what is good, right and true, have had the advantage of nearly twenty centuries of human experience recorded by history, from which to learn to love the right and abhor the evil. And yet, despite these distinct advantages that derive from living in this century, nevertheless, men continue to "accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths . . . who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth," (Cf. 2 Tim. 4:3, 4; 3:7) or be moved to action by it, even though they are genuinely convicted by it.

D. TALK IS NOT CHEAP (12:33-37)

1. BECAUSE SPEECH REVEALS OUR SENSE OF
MORAL DISCERNMENT (12:33-35)

12:33 **Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit.** The transparency of this germ-parable is no problem, for **the tree** is the source of **the fruit**, infusing into the fruit its own nature and vigor, whether for good or ill. (Cf. Jas. 3:10, 11) The question here is just how the Lord means this obvious truth to be applied. What is **the tree** and what **its fruit** in this figure? Is Jesus **the tree**, or the Pharisees? Is **the fruit** His work, His results, His doctrine, or theirs or both? In either case, the imperative ("make the tree") has nothing to do with changing the objective character of **the tree**, but refers only to everyone's understanding of that character. This is evident from the fact that Jesus would not order anyone to make himself morally worthless, nor could He order them to change His objective character either for better or worse ("good" or "corrupt"), since this lies outside their power. But He CAN order them to examine how they put the case in their own mind, regardless of the persons to which they ultimately apply this figure. (Cf. uses of *poietn* in Jn. 5:18; 8:53; 10:33)

1. Jesus Himself is **the tree** referred to and His ministry **its fruit**. If so, He applies to Himself here the same rule He lays down as a measurement of all others. (Cf. Mt. 7:16-20; Lk. 6:43-45) In this illustration Jesus demands that the opposition make a choice: if the results of His life and work are evil, then they are justified in exposing Him as evil, for He produced them. But if casting out demons, and His other miracles in general, brings only glory to God and blessing to mankind, then they are driven to pronounce Him good, for these positive benefits are also His work. Now the Pharisees themselves are faced with a real dilemma: "If we pronounce His work to be good, we are forced to admit the good Spirit at work in Him, in which case we will be laughed off as fools for antagonizing this man of God and we will be found in opposition to God. But if we judge the freeing of a human being from the clutches of demons as a vile, evil deed, the people who recognize this act as humanitarian, will damn us for inhumanity!" The problem He lay before them put their conscience to its most crucial test: can the evident, consistent, excellent results of Jesus' work be the deed of a

vile imposter empowered by Satan? (Study Jn. 10:25, 37, 38 in this connection!)

2. An interesting interpretation of this verse is suggested by an alternative translation: "Either make the tree good, and its fruit (will be) good, or else make the tree corrupt, and its fruit (will be) bad." The addition of the copulative verb is perfectly possible, and even though this translation may also suggest the foregoing meaning, it seems to give another twist to Jesus' picture. Instead of pointing back to the Pharisees' unfair evaluation of His work, it becomes an exhortation to purify the heart, so that all that it produces in words and actions will be sound. Leave the heart corrupt and all that flows from it is corrupted. In support of this explanation it should be noticed that in the following verse Jesus proceeds with this same observation, using more or less literal language. As Lenski (*Matthew*, 487) puts it: "The heart overflowing in speech through the mouth is about the same as the tree with its native fruit. The overflow shows what is in the reservoir."

12:34 Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? Offspring of vipers (*gennémata echidón*) is crisp, vigorous language coming right out of the heart of Jesus, and is the true representation of His heart too, but totally free of that hate-filled bitterness that language like this usually reflects. It is the indignation of the righteous in the face of hypocrisy. But, more important, it represents the judgment of the Judge Himself. He condemns them as morally hopeless! Ironically, by the common standards of Jewish piety, many sincere people accounted these very leaders to be a generation of saints, and, granted the basis upon which this supposed "righteousness" was founded, this popular opinion is understandable. But the Lord exposes them as **a brood of vipers!** (Cf. Mt. 3:7; 23:33) . Because the Pharisees had expressed the maliciousness in their hearts when they accused Jesus of having a secret alliance with the Devil, Jesus is perfectly justified in pointing out the true condition of their lives. (12:24) **Ye being evil** (= "You are evil"): let humble souls, heretofore scandalized by the well-known hypocrisy of these leaders or perhaps burdened by the endless rules required by them—or staggered by their deadly treachery in politics and their moral blindness in practical religion, fear them no longer, for they are **evil**. Even at this point in His ministry, Jesus spares no words in exposing the devilish animus of these accusers.

How can you? The answer anticipated by absolute Justice is "You cannot!" This is the application of Jesus' implied simile about trees and fruits: why should anyone expect moral excellence from you who are so viciously wicked? Should I, or anyone else, look for prime quality fruit on such trees as you? The reason is clear: **for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.** What is in one's heart—its orientation, its prejudices, its points of view, its ideals, its desires, its hates and its loves—**MUST** come out in his speech, whether it be the very wisdom of God or the vilest lies ever conjured up by the Adversary. (Cf. Rev. 13:11, 5. 6; 16:10, 11; 1 Pet. 1:22—2:2; Jas. 3:5ff.; Tit. 1:15; Mt. 15:11-18; Mk. 7:21-23) Study Jesus' way of arguing the proposition that the Jews could not be brought to believe in Him precisely because of the condition of their heart:

1. They did not have God's Word abiding in their heart (Jn. 5:38).
2. Nor did they have the love for God in them, so the hate that came from their lips was more than explicable. (Jn. 5:42)
3. Their heart was set on human approval. (Jn. 5:44)
4. Their heart was hardened (Jn. 12:39) so much so that they could not bear to hear the truth when presented to them (Jn. 8:43). See also Ro. 8:5-7.

What is in the heart will be revealed sooner or later as the conscious or unconscious confession of the lips. (Cf. Ro. 10:9, 10)

12:35 The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. Study 13:52 where Jesus uses this same figure to speak of scribes trained for the Kingdom of God as being similar to a provident householder who is able to bring out of his treasure both old and new things. This is possible, because the man actually possesses those things and is, therefore, the richer for it. Jewish theologians of Jesus' day who were willing to accept the mentality of Jesus, His point of view regarding the Kingdom, etc., coming as they did from the rich history of God's dealings with Israel, were able to produce out of their own religious heritage and theological experience, great, new insights into true reality and the will of the living God. From the human stand-point alone, they were centuries ahead of mere philosophers groping for insight without the benefit of the same divine revelation which the Hebrews had in their theological treasure. So also here, **to bring forth** (something) **out of** (one's) **treasure** means that any man can hope to express, by means

of his words, actions and influence, only what he himself really is or what he really possesses in his life. This observation, when used as objectively as humanly possible, becomes the test whereby we can judge our progress toward maturity: what is the general character of the way we are treating people? What is the general tone of our conversation? (Use Eph. 4:25-32; 5:3, 4; Phil. 2:14; 4:4-8; Col. 3:8-17; 4:5, 6, etc. as typical standards.) It should be obvious from this, although, unfortunately, too often it is not, that the subject, direction and tone of our conversations is a perfect mirror of the condition of our life. Christians may too often presume that indulging in complaining, merciless censuring, selfish wrangling and the like, is perfectly harmless precisely because it cannot harm the person or possessions of another fellow human, as would theft, rape or murder. But Jesus insists here that everything we say is an accurate reflection of what we are, and for this reason, we must be judged by what we say. (12:37)

As in the preceding verse, so also here, a man's **treasure** is what HE thinks valuable, whether it be objectively good or bad. It is his wealth measured in "thoughts, judgments, convictions and the like." (Lenski, *Matthew*, 487) And it is truly **his treasure** in the sense that only he has made it so by assembling what is there deposited and only he can draw from that fund of knowledge, opinions or attitudes. (When we speak of drawing on the knowledge-fund of others, we really mean to increase our own treasure from which we may later draw as the occasion arises. And we can only draw from their treasure as they are willing to communicate or share with us what is in their mind. So it is we ourselves who decide what goes into the treasury of our own minds.) Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 51f.) reminds us that:

It is an obvious fact that there is nothing so revealing as words. We do not need to talk to a man long before we discover whether he has a mind that is pure or a mind that is dirty; . . . whether he has a mind that is kind and sympathetic or . . . cruel, callous, critical; we do not need to listen for long to a man who is preaching, teaching or lecturing to find out whether his mind is clear and lucid or . . . muddled and involved . . . It is the words which a man speaks in his unguarded moments, the words which he speaks without thinking, . . . when the conventional restraints are removed, which really show what he is like. As Plummer puts it, "The carefully spoken word may be a calculated hypocrisy."

But does not Jesus' general discourse here contradict much of human experience? He urges that character is known by conduct: "So then by their fruits you will know them. . . ." What is in the heart will come out in the speech, He says. Nevertheless, is it not one of the facts of experience that right conduct and bad character may be found together right in the same person? Is it not a rather common fallacy to think that the really important test of a man's character is what he *does*, thus implying that right conduct is always a safe and certain clue to character? Marshall (*Challenge of New Testament Ethics*, 63ff.) illustrates this point well and concludes that proper conduct is neither a certain clue to character nor a way to achieve it. Then he resolves the apparent inconsistency between this universal observation about human conduct and what Jesus intends to teach:

It is sometimes objected that such an idea (i.e. conduct is no certain clue to character) is flatly contradicted by our Lord's words: 'So then by their fruits you will know them.' Here surely Jesus teaches that character is known by conduct, that just as a fig tree is known as such by the fruit it bears, so what a man *is* is known by what he *does*! That is true, but Jesus is thinking of conduct *as a whole*, conduct so extended as to cover the whole man, with all his actions, words, motives and thoughts, conduct as the natural and inevitable expression of a man's very nature, like the fruit which a tree bears because it can bear no other. The whole point of the illustration which precedes this utterance of Jesus is that without a good tree there can be no really good fruit—and just as a good tree is essential to genuinely good fruit, so a good character is essential to genuinely good conduct. . . . When outwardly right conduct does happen to appear in a man whose motives are mean or base, it would be dismissed, if all the facts were known, as rotten fruit. That right conduct of a sort can and does appear in men whose character leaves much to be desired, Jesus was well aware.

So, what has been observed here about one's unplanned or unconscious expressions explains why, on the one hand, we can find right conduct in those whose motivations are corrupt, since for some reason they believe that their own interests can be advanced and so what they do is done for personal profit. Hence, what they express publicly as apparently good or right conduct is no indicator of their real character, for it takes in too little of their *total* conduct. A study of

their total conduct would disclose their sinful prudence, their scheming, their cunning and selfishness. It is in this sense alone that Jesus intends His dictum: "By ALL their fruits you shall know them. . . . The (genuinely) good man out of his (total) good treasure brings forth good. . . ."

So, what should **the good man** do, when he hears out of his own mouth clamor or bitter, hateful talk of which he is immediately ashamed? Let him thank God for this reminder that he is yet in need of God's grace and dependent upon Him for forgiveness, lest he be proud of his growth toward maturity. Let him humble himself and say, "I am afraid that there is probably more vileness down there in my heart than I had thought, since I had thought myself incapable of such language. But I was wrong. Forgive me for what I myself repudiate, even though I said it!" The motivation behind such confession of sin is not only the transparent honesty that admits sin even in oneself, but also that genuinely righteous unwillingness to justify it even to protect oneself. In the ultimate analysis, it is only with SINNERS that Jesus can do anything. (Cf. Mt. 9:9-13 Notes) For the righteous (those who fancy themselves such), who drive themselves unmercifully to present themselves as perfect in the eyes of others, do not wish so to bare their sinfulness before men.

Observe that, for Jesus, there are only two classes: **the good man** and **the evil man**. Elsewhere the Lord defines what constitutes the difference between each class and what qualifies a person to be in it: total confidence in Jesus or lack of it. Even a disciple of Jesus, who is yet quite imperfect and troubled by sin, is **good**, by Jesus' reckoning, because he trusts Jesus to make him perfect. This makes even the relative good moral person, who trusts his own relative moral maturity to carry him, an **evil man**. This concept is more fully developed by Paul, especially in his meaty discussions on the relative uselessness of the works of righteousness which man himself does trying to be "good enough."

2. THERE ARE NO WORDS THAT DO NOT COUNT, FOR GOD HOLDS US ACCOUNTABLE FOR ALL WE SAY (12:36-37)

12:36 **And I say unto you.** What follows is no mere addition to the foregoing argument (though it is this too, of course). What follows is the authoritative declaration of One qualified to declare the norms by which every member of the human race will be judged in that great Day. **Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.** Idle (*argòs*) means (1) "unemployed, idle, with nothing to do" of men in

the marketplace, Mt. 20:3, 6; (2) "idle, lazy" of widows, 1 Tim. 5:13, . . . "neglectful of, careless . . ." (3) "useless," Jas. 2:20; 2 Pet. 1:8; *rhéma argòn*, "a careless word," which, because of its worthlessness, had better been left unspoken. (Arndt-Gingrich, 104) Does the Lord see some of His audience squirming and uncomfortable because of His frank appraisal of their most honored theologians, who would wish to excuse them by whining that they had not seriously intended to accuse Him of being in league with Satan? Or that their accusation of demon-possession had been hastily or carelessly uttered? If so, even those tell-tale words spoke eloquent volumes about the men who had uttered them. Men are more or less willing to accept responsibility for words which they have carefully considered and tend to excuse themselves for careless utterances to which they give little importance and which are soon forgotten. But the Master insists that **every idle word** is the object of God's notice and concern, not merely those words which were carefully calculated to impress the hearers, and if **every idle word**, how much more those which are well-pondered! (Ps. 139:4) In the field of human psychology Sigmund Freud receives credit for discovering, or, at least, popularizing, what Jesus Christ had already stated: what issues from the lips in speech was really present in the mind of the speaker and so much a part of his personality as to be a correct index of his character. A person is really accountable for ALL that he says, even though he may wish to repent of those his own words of which he may be ashamed. Thank God for repentance and forgiveness of sins!

But if it be true that "the carefully spoken word may be a calculated hypocrisy" (Plummer), and if careless, idle speech is that for which the speaker takes no conscious responsibility, what is the practical implication of Jesus' doctrine and how are we to understand the Apostles' urging Christians to control their speech? (cf. Eph. 5:4; Col. 4:6; Jude 15, 16, *et al.*) Would this not tend to cause men merely to sublimate their vilest blasphemies, thus leaving their real thoughts unsaid and so promote the deepest hypocrisy?

1. No, because if men for Jesus' sake begin to start taking their own careless speech seriously, it ceases to be **idle** or **careless**. It becomes considered speech. And as they seriously ponder the worthlessness, the carelessness and the real damage to themselves and others that it represents, they arrive at the conclusion that they must repent of it and seek God's forgiveness. This is not mere sublimation, but elimination.
2. And the conscious effort to cultivate proper speech that gives

grace to the hearer is not done for the sake of mere culture, but for Jesus' sake and in order to grow up into the image of Him.

3. The total result of the Lord's approach is the conversion of the character of the individual, so that for him there can be no words which are somehow secular while others are holy, some which count while others do not. Here again, as earlier (5:33-37), Jesus is insisting upon the sanctity and importance of every human expression.

Our Savior knows that "if any one makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also." (Jas. 3:2) This is why His admonition is psychologically so important, for He knows that the discipline, required to control one's own tongue, is going to produce the desired effect in the discipline of all else in one's life. Unlike merely human psychologies, Jesus' view of man has a thorough-going theological orientation, so fundamental that it really deals with man's total need.

Account in the day of judgment. Here there is no debating the reality or necessity of judgment, but simply the insistence that we recognize the fact that, though our words be as unrecalable or ungovernable as feathers strewn in a windstorm, yet God has them all collected and on file. Long-forgotten conversations that seemingly made little impression upon our consciousness are subject to immediate recall by God! (Ro. 14:12; 1 Pet. 4:5)

12:37 **For:** He states the reason for the surprising conclusion just given. The severely-measured accountability is based upon the scrutiny of one's heart and this is revealed by whatever the mouth betrays about the heart's contents and character. **By thy words,** or by what a man says, he betrays his real religion, regardless of all his protestations to the contrary. Orthodoxy of creed is not the final test, says Jesus, but what that creed causes a man to do or say. (Jas. 1:26; cf. Prov. 18:21; 13:3; Mal. 3:13-15; Lk. 19:22) **Thou shalt be justified . . . condemned.** Nothing is intended here about a person's justifying himself by the sheer glibness of his speech, for the real Justifier here, as ever, is God. While it is true that in this life we really do justify or condemn an individual by his words, holding him responsible for what he says, and while it is true that people try to clear themselves by artful self-defence, Jesus is discussing issues that will be concluded **in the day of judgment.** There only God justifies or condemns.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Tell of the character and position of the Pharisees, showing why they would level such a charge as they make against Jesus in this section.
2. Does either Matthew or Mark say clearly that the Pharisees (who said Jesus was in league with Beelzebub) actually did blaspheme the Holy Spirit? If so, how? If not, what did Jesus mean by what He said regarding blasphemy?
3. Quote or paraphrase all of Jesus' answers to the charge that He was in league with Satan. Explain what they meant and how they applied to the accusation.
4. What is the meaning of the expression "Son of David"? How was it intended by the crowds in this section? Why did the Pharisees object to its use with reference to Jesus?
5. Did the crowds actually call Jesus "the Son of David"? How do you know?
6. Explain as far as the evidence goes what can be known about demons and demon possession. Who or what are demons? List the phenomena mentioned in the Bible generally surrounding demon possession. Describe Jesus' methods for casting them out.
7. Who were the "sons" of the Pharisees who cast out demons? What was the point Jesus was making by bringing them into the argument?
8. What is the slander involved in linking Jesus with Beelzebub? Who or what was Beelzebub or Beelzebub in Jewish thinking?
9. What is the meaning of the argument about the strong man, and the method for stealing his goods?
10. What are the possible interpretations of Jesus' denial of the possibility of neutrality: "He that is not with me is against me"? Give evidence for and against each, selecting which you think best fits Jesus' meaning in this context.
11. From what field of endeavor does the expression come: "He that gathers not with me, scatters"? Is this a Hebraism, parallel to the preceding declaration, or is this a separate thought, advancing Jesus' argument one more full step?
12. In what sense does Jesus mean the statement: "Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men"?
13. Of what sin were the Pharisees and theologians who were then attacking Jesus guilty? What was the real source of their sin?
14. Explain the connection between the discussion about the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the following discussion

about the nature of one's heart.

15. Had the Pharisees and theologians committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? What evidence indicates this?
16. Had Jesus' friends committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit by referring to His unflagging zeal to keep on helping people at the expense of His own rest and comfort as "madness"?
17. Who were these well-meaning "friends and/or relatives" who tried to save Jesus from Himself by seizing Him to take Him away from it all? How do you know? What relation does your answer have to the fact that shortly after this event Jesus' mother and brothers interrupt Jesus' preaching by asking Him to step outside to talk with them?
18. Can a man speak righteously and have a wicked heart? Can a man speak wickedly and have a good heart? State Jesus' general rule and then show how the seeming exceptions to the rule are not exceptions at all, but examples of something else of which Jesus warned us, which, in turn, proves this general rule true also.
19. What kind of a word is an "idle word"?
20. What is the meaning of the expression (in Mark's parallel) "He hath Beelzebub"?
21. Was the remark, that Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons, itself blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Explain.
22. Is the sin against the Holy Spirit something people can and do commit today? If so, how? If not, why not?

Section 29

JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH

(Possible Parallel: Lk. 11:16, 24, 26, 29-32)

TEXT: 12:38-45

38. Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, we would see a sign from thee.
39. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet:
40. for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
41. The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.

42. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.
43. But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth it not.
44. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.
45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this generation.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss repentance. What is it? How is it important? What statements by Jesus show that a negative repentance, or the mere putting an evil thing out of one's life, is insufficient?
- b. How should we understand and apply what Jesus said about a demon returning to the man from which it had departed?
- c. John said that a record of the miracles was given that men might believe (John 20:30, 31), and Jesus clearly stated that miracles were basic to faith. Here, however, Jesus rebuked the desire for signs and said that it proceeded from a wicked heart. How do you harmonize these statements?
- d. Do you think that something more than evidence is needed to produce conviction in a man, that is strong enough to cause him to change his life? What is the relationship between a man's will and the evidence presented to his mind?
- e. Why do you suppose it was so sinful for these theologians to ask for special supernatural proof of Jesus' authority? What kind of sign would have satisfied them? Why were they seeking a sign? Were not they the rightful religious authority that, as defenders of public morality and religion, not only had the right but also the obligation to demand the credentials of all religious teachers including Jesus?
- f. What do you see as the difference, if indeed there is a difference, between the requesting of a sign from heaven on the part of these Pharisees on the one hand and the requesting of signs from heaven on the part of someone like Gideon, on the other? (Judges 6:36-40)
- g. What is so special about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead

that causes Jesus to say that it is the one sign He will give, that would convince the Jews of His divine identity and authority? What about the other miracles that He had done that accomplished the same purpose for other people before the resurrection ever took place? (Jn. 14:11) Was there something inferior or deficient in those other miracles?

- h. How do you account for the fact that Jesus in this text declares that He will give no other sign to that generation than that of His resurrection, while, as a matter of fact, He is recorded as having done many other miracles long after this statement, yet they were done before He died and rose again. How do you account for this fact?
- i. Is not God to be the Judge at the great judgment? How then can the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South stand up at the judgment to condemn the people of Jesus' generation?
- j. Jesus gives a precise statement that no one can mistake: "So shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Yet, none of the Gospel writers, Apostles and enemies of Jesus ever record this prophecy or sign as being actually fulfilled. All who ever speak of Jesus' predictions or of the fulfillment, describe Jesus as having arisen "on the third day," or "after three days," or something similar. How then do you harmonize this precise language in the prophecy or sign with the loose language of the supposed fulfillment? Is it possible that Jesus made a mistake? Is it possible that the Apostles misunderstood His meaning here? Should we reinterpret all the Last Week passages that concern the facts of the burial and resurrection period as so to fit the "three days and three nights" prediction even if this makes the Apostles contradict the Lord?
- k. Some scholars are for various reasons not convinced that the book of Jonah is a book of sober history. They describe it as "poetic fiction, an allegory, a parable, a prose poem, a didactic story, a midrash, a symbolic book, a legend containing a kernel of fact." On the basis of Jesus' use of the experience of Jonah here in this context, do you think it possible to discern whether it is any of the foregoing, or else a narrative of historical fact? If not, why not? If so, upon what basis?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then some of the theologians and Pharisees demanded, "Teacher, we wish to see supernatural proof from God that establishes your authority to teach."

But Jesus refused, "Only evil and faithless people ask for more proof of my identity as if all the proof I have just given were not enough. I will not provide further proof to satisfy your idle curiosity, except the portent involved in the miraculous history of Jonah the prophet. That demonstration is this: In the same way that Jonah spent the better part of three days in the great fish and so became a sign from God to the inhabitants of Nineveh, so will I, the Son of man, spend the better part of three days and nights buried in the earth. By this means will my experience become a supernatural proof to the people of this present age that God is actually speaking through me.

"The inhabitants of Nineveh will stand up on judgment day along with the people of these times and the Ninevites, as mute witnesses, will condemn you. This is true because they felt their need to turn to God and did so with reference to the message preached by Jonah. But you have heard something here greater than Jonah!

"Similarly, at the judgment, the Queen of the South will stand up as mute testimony against the unbelievers of this generation and condemn you. You see, she felt the longing for greater wisdom than she possessed and came halfway around the world just to listen to **Solomon's wisdom**. Listen: there is something involved here greater than Solomon!

"This evil, unbelieving generation is like a man out of whom a demon has departed. The demon goes through dry country looking for a place to rest, but he never finds it. Then the demon says to himself, 'I will return to my home I just left.' So the demon returns and finds the man empty, cleaned up a bit, tidy—but **EMPTY**. Then the demon goes and rounds up seven other demons that, for wickedness, make him look like a beginner! This gang of demons comes and moves in to live there. So in the end, the plight of that man is much worse than at the beginning. And that is just what is going to happen to this generation of evil people!

SUMMARY

Jesus warned the skeptic religionists of His day that a religion that only makes a man empty and unable even to discern the obvious evidences of God's working in his own generation, is false, regardless of all else that might be said for it. It is incapable of filling life. There have been people in history that, with less evidence than the theologians were demanding of Jesus, turned to God and expended great effort to learn even a portion of God's wisdom and truth from God's people. But there is far more evidence now for this generation

than those underprivileged people of Jonah's or Solomon's generations ever possessed. This generation will be condemned by those far less-privileged people who did better with their far inferior opportunities to know the truth.

NOTES

A. UNREASONABLE REQUEST (12:38)

12:38 **Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, we would see a sign from thee.** Then (*Tôte*) suggests an immediate temporal connection between the preceding incident and this demand that Jesus present His credentials. Whether it occurred immediately upon the conclusion of the Lord's forensic victory over the Pharisees or, as Luke suggests (11:16), was part of their original attack, is not so important as the spirit which this question manifests and the additional illustration it provides us of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. **Certain of the scribes and Pharisees**, though not the same persons as those who accused Jesus of secret alliance with Satan. (Note Luke's *héteroï*, 11:16, if parallel.)

Teacher, we would see a sign from thee. Their right to requested this is undoubted and is the proper safeguard against imposture. (Cf. Dt. 18:15-22; 13:1-5) Because of these Mosaic regulations granted to the Jews on the importance and nature of supernatural credentials, they were so ahead of the rest of the world that Paul could safely generalize, describing his people: "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom." (1 Co. 1:22) But in this group of rabbis now surrounding Jesus, were there any who were beginning to feel that Jesus had brought them face to face with real, divine authority, or that He might possibly be, after all, the Messiah with all the concomitant majesty and authority? Were there any who, feeling themselves so deeply but strangely swayed by His unparalleled ministry, now sensed their need either to acknowledge Him once and for all or to repudiate His claims and destroy Him? Were there any who felt that some compelling miracle would really overcome what they had come to believe were objections honestly arrived at? While a mentality of honest and proper doubt is at the base of this demand for signs in general, lest those who are to be influenced by the message vouchsafed by them be deceived by presumptuous revelations falsely attributed to God (cf. Jn. 2:18 and the attitude of the Jerusalem committee toward John the Baptist, Jn. 1:19-28), more often than not this sign-seeking attitude was, as A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's*

Greek Testament, in loc.) termed it: "impudent, insulting and hypocritical." Whereas their tone is formally respectful, it is motivated by infinite cunning, because it was really an appeal to the multitudes by a display of authority, and, at the same time, a ploy to maintain their own prestige, a stratagem they often employed when no other reasonable objection presented itself. (Cf. Mt. 15:39b—16:4; 27:42 and par.; Mk. 8:11, 12; Lk. 11:16, 29, 30; 23:8; Jn. 6:30) Their purpose here, as elsewhere, is clearly to trap Him by means which He either cannot or will not escape. (Cf. Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:35; [Jn. 8:6]) Though their action is described as *πειράζοντες*, which can be interpreted as that neutrally oriented testing of a thing to see of what it is made, or the testing of a person to see how he reacts, nevertheless Jesus reads their motives written on their hearts and declares them as **evil and adulterous**. So their nicely-worded challenge is neither objective nor sincere. Their imposture is unmasked when they who sit on the jury of inquest, because of personal prejudices and moral failure, refuse to admit the evidence of signs already given. By rejecting the obvious proof of other evidence, they disqualify themselves and automatically surrender their right to demand signs, for, by their tacit admission, they cannot arrive at a satisfactory conclusion verified by and based upon all foregoing evidence. Their hypocrisy is discovered when these self-appointed, but disqualified, judges resolutely maintain their effrontery in making such a demand.

From thee: They demanded not only that the sign be done by Jesus but that it be **from heaven**. (Cf. Mk. 8:11; Mt. 16:1; Lk. 11:16) What were they expecting? (Cf. Jn. 6:31; 1 Sam. 12:18; 1 Kg. 18)

1. Is Lenski (*Matthew*, 490) correct in putting the emphasis upon "a sign to see" (*σημεῖον ἰδεῖν*), as if they demanded something that required no faith, but just sight in order to be converted to Him as the divine Messiah? Do we see here an unhealthy craving for an astronomical circus performance in which the sun, moon and stars perform antics, in which unworldly visions appear against the heavenly backdrop or in which angelic armies suddenly become visible as they pass in review in the presence of God?

But what is wrong with drawing back the curtain to the spiritual world, permitting mortals to see the universe full of music, color, light and beauty—worlds crammed to overflowing with evidences of God's presence and care? After

all, is this not the promised fulfilment after which our Christian longing yearns? Could there be any spiritual harm in demonstrating once and for all that Jesus alone can, by the single force of the spoken word, perform greater feats than those of which even the wildest imagination of writers of science fiction or of the tellers of ancient myths could dream? Are the commentaries correct in saying that such prodigies would meet no spiritual need, would point to no salvation from sin and would share nothing in common with saving faith? Is it true that such portents would only satisfy temporarily that morbid part of our being, because when fed would only cry for more, and when no more is forthcoming, reverts to the old dissatisfactions, doubts and denials? (So, Lenski, *ad loc.*) After reading C. S. Lewis' Christian mythology (*The Tales of Narnia*) and his trilogy of science fiction (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Voyage to Venus* and *That Hideous Strength*), one can no longer be so sure that such visions must necessarily produce such bad fruits. Lewis makes a good case for living out one's life on earth in genuine conformity to God's will even after having personally walked and lived among angels and stars. Further, however imperfectly Lewis may have imagined the reality, such experiences left the earthling more than satisfied with their reality both while they were being experienced and longing for them when he left them to return to the present experiences of earth life. But the longing for the breaking in upon earth's reality by the celestial life, as Lewis imagined it, was perfectly consonant with the longing for the presence of God. But even among Lewis' characters we find people who were not gently drawn to these same happy conclusions. Rather, just because of their character, they are repelled by everything that attracts and satisfies those who choose to be servants of God. This, of course, just proves the validity of the evidence which they rejected and consequently the justice of their condemnation. Lewis proves thus that it is possible to imagine a personal, first-hand experience of celestial phenomena without one's freedom being violated.

And that such a vision could actually minister to men's spiritual needs is demonstrated by the supposition that Jesus could have opened their eyes to fantastic spiritual realities, even as God did for His lesser servant, Elisha, when he

prayed that He grant this vision to his servant. (2 Kg. 6:14-17) He could have drawn back the curtain for an apocalyptic portrayal of the past, present and future vicissitudes of God's people and their final victory in Christ. And this kind of demonstration, such as we actually find filmed in the book of Revelation, could have been made so as to produce in the witnesses that kind of satisfaction with the reality of Jesus' authority that to deny what they would have experienced would be a denial of themselves. This does not mean that they would have automatically submitted themselves to His will or entered His discipleship, for sheer display of heavenly power or visions can produce quite the opposite effect. (Cf. Mt. 8:34 Notes; Ex. 20:18-22) Naked supernaturalism does not impel belief. Therefore, Jesus could have performed this sign without damaging their will, so that they would somehow have been forced to believe against their wishes. So why did He not do it? See on 12:39, 40.

2. **From Heaven:** Is this a Hebraistic circumlocution for "from God"? Or was this demand due to a popular suspicion that miracles done on earth could be rigged, whereas signs **from heaven**, taking place in a sphere where no human hand could possibly manipulate, would not be deceptive, spurious or counterfeited, hence, more genuine, more convincing? Under the influence of the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period, they may have actually been demanding the literal manifestation of the messianic, royal display pictured in those popularizations of Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah's appearance. Also, since some of their own disciples or even rabbis themselves were known to have performed exorcisms (as those to which Jesus Himself alludes for sake of argument, 12:27), or since some of their rabbis claimed to have healed by their great (supposed) piety or prayers, let Him provide some astounding, decisive and indubitable proof of His authority. (See Edersheim *Life*, II, 68, 69)

B. LOGICAL REFUSAL (12:39)

12:39 **But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it . . .** The very character of the questors themselves is Jesus' reason for refusing to give what they ask, not that He could not, in the nature of signs, provide the most

extraordinary miracle to demonstrate His identity and bedazzle them with His glory and power. But in what sense are they so culpable? (Cf. other similar characterizations of people who stand in the presence of substantial proof but act the part of unbelievers: Mk. 8:38; Mt. 17:17; Ac. 2:40; Phil. 2:15) Are they more specifically wicked than perverts, kidnappers or any other sinners in the catalogues? Their request provoked a groan in Jesus (Mk. 8:12), because here are the elders of His nation, the standard product and best examples of that religion they professed to be from God in exactly the traditionalized form currently taught, whom He must condemn, placing them on a par with brutish, irreligious men. And He **MUST** do this, because their religiousness has made them into persons who can fly in the face of all foregoing evidence that should have been sufficient to convince them and still demand signs, as if nothing worthy of the name had ever been done!

1. They are **adulterous**. **Adulterous**, in this peculiarly Jewish context, describes that spiritual infidelity according to which Israel, formally united to God by a covenant as binding and as intimate as marriage, spurned her divine Husband by idolatry, hypocrisy and indifference toward God. (Study Jer. 2:2; 3:1-22; Hos. 1:2—2:20; 4:10; 7:4; Ezek. 16 and 23) What were the percentages for believing that these spiritual descendents of patriarchs, who could commit fornication in the name of religion in full view of the burning, holy mountain where God had just given the most fantastic display of His own holiness and presence, would somehow respond any better, or be more significantly affected by a marvellous display of supernatural fireworks? It is unfaithfulness to God to ask for more signs than those He deems already sufficient!

2. They are **evil**:

- a. Because their motive for asking for a sign is not that they might have good reasons for believing Him and submitting to His Lordship, but that they might be even more confirmed in their despising His revolutionary doctrine. They were not asking for evidence for faith, but for more material to criticize.
- b. Because they desired to be vindicated in that rejection in the mind of the multitude. Their eye was not set on seeing truth, but on seeing their prestige and influence reestablished with the people.

- c. Because these unfaithful Jews are rejecting those portents by which God had already signalled the identity and consequent authority of the Messiah. In their perversity they 'prescribe' what course of action God Himself has to follow to suit their whims. Because they turned their back upon the multitudinous evidences that God had already given, it became morally impossible to concede them what they require. Dictating to God is evil!
- d. Because it is sin to reject evidence. (Dt. 18:18, 19; cf. Lk. 16:30, 31) These scribes were being disloyal to their own law and blatantly blind to all the prophetic precedents in their long history of God's dealings with Israel through men who brought just such evidences as Jesus now presented.

So it would not have mattered what manner of evidence the Lord COULD have presented them, their character rendered any objective examination of it impossible. The word **generation** refers specifically to **this evil generation** of Jews then confronting Jesus (v. 45; Mk. 8:12; Lk. 11:29), but the denunciation is also applicable to ANY group in any era that refuses the testimony of evidence that contradicts their pet theories and by which refusal they hope to defend their skepticism. In order better to appreciate what is involved here in the nature of supernatural evidence, contrast Jesus' answer given to the Pharisees with that sent to John the Baptist. (11:11ff.) The Pharisees could not be treated in the same manner as was John, since they rejected the evidential power of Jesus' miracles as credentials by ascribing them to the power of Satan, whereas John accepted the witness of Jesus' works as the mighty acts of God. So, in his case the Lord could refer him to them.

And there shall no sign be given to it . . . McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 1f) argues that:

In demanding of Jesus a sign, the scribes and Pharisees denied by implication that any of the multitude of signs which he had wrought were real signs; and their demand was for one of a different kind. In answering that no sign should be given but that of the prophet, he could not have meant that he would give no more of the kind which he had been giving; for he did give more of these, and in great abundance; but he meant that none should be given of a different kind, except the sign of Jonah. This was different, in that it

was wrought *upon* him, and not *by* him, and it was therefore a more direct and manifest exhibition of power from heaven.

C. MERCIFUL EXCEPTION (12:39c; 40)

12:39c and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. Here is written the wisdom and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ: in the presence of His fiercest opponents, who themselves deserve nothing but an eternity of tortured conscience, He graciously grants them precisely what they ask, a sign of a different type. For even this merciful exception to His own strict rule ("No sign shall be given.") is in itself a demand that these critics suspend judgment until the fulfilment of the sign given. Study Dt. 18:15-22). From a Jewish standpoint, therefore, they got everything they asked for, even though it was not precisely what they would have dictated, had that opportunity been offered them. Our Lord can make even the most insidious, dishonest, unfair demand to boomerang upon those who make it, and, at the same time, provide Himself with further evidence of His true identity. So the resurrection is to be the one great sign which might yet convince them, since all signs and miracles previous to the resurrection are given power and significance by it. No one miracle stands alone, but receives its meaning from the resurrection, because a permanently dead miracle-worker is of less abiding significance than a living, resurrected Lord. Thus it was that Jesus was to be "designated Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead . . ." (Ro. 1:4; cf. Jn. 2:18-22) This act of God in raising Jesus from death was His authentic stamp of approval not only upon the words and acts of Jesus (Cf. Ac. 2:22-33), but also God's guarantee that it is with THIS Man, and no other, that all men must have to do. (Ac. 17:31)

The sign of Jonah the prophet, as a phrase, suggests that it would have been a sign well known to the original hearers, especially to anyone acquainted with the history of that prophet. However, in what did this particular sign consist? Did Jesus intend to apply only certain features in the episode of Jonah's life, i.e. only the incident of the sea monster and not the preaching of repentance to the pagan metropolis? These questions are answered by Jesus' next statement, which, while there is absolutely no textual evidence against it, has been the basis of many ingenious, but unsuccessful, attempts to expunge it from the original words of Christ. (See Plummer, *Matthew*, 183; McGarvey, *Jesus and Jonah*, chap. I; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, I, 383) The sign of Jonah must be interpreted in light of Jesus' own

application of it in this context, and not by some other use He is thought to have made elsewhere of this incident in the life of Jonah. (Cf. Lk. 11:30 and Plummer's comments thereon as well as on Mt. 12:40. The agnostic commentaries tend to place the emphasis on the preaching of Jonah and deny as preposterous the miraculous elements in Jonah's experience.)

12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Despite the no little temptation to see in Jonah's mission to Nineveh a symbolical and typical importance (with Keil, *Minor Prophets*, I, 383ff.), these words are Jesus' explanation of what HE means by **the sign of Jonah**. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 9ff.) argues that:

His own resurrection, after entombment for three days, is called the sign of Jonah, because of the similarity of the two miracles. This view is confirmed by the consideration that it was undoubtedly a miraculous sign which the scribes and Pharisees demanded; and the word sign in his answer must be understood in the same sense. . . . But how could Jonah have been a miraculous sign to the Ninevites? He wrought no miracle among them; and his preaching could not have been regarded by them as miraculous until, by means of some separate miraculous sign they were convinced that it was a miraculous prediction. That which made him a sign to the Ninevites must then have been his experience in the fish, connected as it was with the command twice given to go and cry against Nineveh. But did the Ninevites hear of the sign of Jonah before they repented at his preaching? These men and many others answer, no; and they so answer because the fact is not stated in the Book of Jonah. But while it is not stated in that book, it is stated by Jesus, and there is nothing in the book which conflicts with the statement. On the contrary, the book leaves the way open for the supposition that the news of the miracle reached Nineveh as soon as Jonah did, if not sooner. . . . Necessarily, then, if there was a real analogy, and not a sophistical assertion of one, the sign in the person of Jonah must have been communicated to the Ninevites, and it must, as in the other case (i.e. of Jesus' resurrection, HEF) have been the controlling evidence on which their faith and their consequent repentance rested . . . the sign of Jonah was the miracle wrought on

his person, and . . . this was certainly known to the Ninevites before they repented at his preaching. . . .

And it is to be noticed that, in drawing an analogy between His future resurrection and the experience of the prophet, the Lord asserts that **Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale** (sic: ASV; better: **sea monster**, so ASV footnote and Arndt-Gingrich on *kétos*, since **whale** may be too specific a word to describe this specially prepared fish.) Attacks on the force of Jesus' affirmation of the historicity of the facts surrounding Jonah have been suggested along the lines mentioned by Plummer (*Matthew*, 183):

Our Lord's mention of Jonah as preaching to the Ninevites does not require us to believe that the story of Jonah is history. In His own parables He made use of fiction for instruction. Why should He not use an O.T. parable for the same purpose? If He were on earth now, would He not quote Dante?

McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*) has so thoroughly dealt with these and other similar attacks, that one could do no better than to summarize his answers to the objections and simply acknowledge our indebtedness. Page numbers in each case refer to *Jesus and Jonah*.

1. Objection: "Writers and speakers of every age and people speak of fictional characters and their experiences as if they were real, without, at the same time, assuming any objective reality for the existence or activities of those characters. Or, in relation to written works, they may refer to them without concerning themselves about their historicity, literary form, authorship or date of composition."
 - a. McGarvey (19): "If the hearers of Jesus had so understood the story of Jonah, the cases would be parallel; but it is notorious, and it is freely admitted that they understood the story to be true, and when, therefore, Jesus spoke of it as a true story, he deceived them if it was not."
 - b. In other words, such allusions to fictional characters and experiences are permissible only where writer and readers or speaker and audience know where each other stands on the question of the objective non-existence of those characters. One can cite even Walt Disney's cartoon characters as illustrations without being thought a fool, so long as his audience is aware of where he stands on

the question of their ultimate, objective reality. But where he gives the impression that he holds their view of the matter when he really disagrees, then he conveys a false impression.

2. Objection: "The reference to Jonah is an illustration and, as such, serves only to suggest a thought which does not rest, for its effectiveness as a means of conveying the thought, upon the full historical validity of the thing which serves as the basis for the illustration."
 - a. McGarvey (20): "The question is not whether an illustration drawn from a supposed fact would be invalidated by the discovery that the account of the fact is allegorical; but whether the particular use Jesus made of the story of Jonah implies that Jonah was in the fish . . . for if Jesus treated the story as historical in speaking to men who held it to be so, then He was either mistaken about it himself, or he deceived his hearers. There is no possible escape from this alternative."
 - b. But granted that this is an illustration, what is thereby proved against the historicity of the story upon which the illustration is based? Again, McGarvey (21): "The undoubted reality of the past fact is what gives force to the assertion respecting the future one. . . . If the Pharisees could have answered Jesus, as these critics now do, by saying, Very well, Master; Jonah was not in the bowels of the fish; they could have added: therefore, according to your own showing, you will not be in the heart of the earth. Instead of being an illustration of something . . . the remark was a solemn prediction of a fact yet to be, which should be analogous to one that certainly had been."
3. Objection: "The book of Jonah was a well-known didactic parable written expressly to communicate a great moral lesson. Hence, Jesus' hearers would have understood His reference to that parable of Jonah and, consequently, He would not have given them a false impression."
 - a. Who can prove, however, that the Jews of Jesus' day understood the book of Jonah to be anything less than sober history?
 - b. But for any sort of moral lesson to be taught, the audience must understand the reference made by the speaker. While it is possible and admissible to use fictitious characters or make reference to imaginary facts as if they were real,

if Jesus were doing this, then, His hearers did not understand His allusion, since they thought Jonah to be history. If Jesus believed Jonah to be fiction, then He made a false impression, because He talked as if it were fact. (McGarvey, 23)

- c. So what is left is a Jesus that cannot be acquitted of the charge of intentional duplicity if He knew that the event was not real and yet used it to confirm their impression that it was. (McGarvey, 24)

Nor is there any hope of admitting a portion of the book of Jonah as containing a kernel of truth, while rejecting the rest as unhistorical, unreliable accretions of a later age. Some would teach that Jesus' notice concerning Jonah may be trusted only to justify credence in that kernel of fact upon which the traditional exterior ultimately rests. But the "traditional exterior" which is passed over as "unhistorical, unreliable accretions", that is, referred to in this manner by the critics, is precisely those elements that are miraculous. McGarvey (32) is right to notice that:

If the words of Jesus . . . prove that the narrative of Jonah rests "ultimately upon a basis of fact"; that the outlines of the narrative are historical, and that the Ninevites did actually repent, why does not his explicit declaration that "Jonah was three days and three nights in the bowels of the sea monster" prove that this also is historical? I am afraid, after all, that the ultimate reason for denying the credibility of the narrative is that which is the avowed reason of unbelievers—an unwillingness to accept the miraculous in the story—and this is the very essence of skepticism.

Others, in the endeavor to relieve themselves from the dilemma of seeing Jesus committed to a position unfavorable to the skeptical critics, follow the expedient of pontificating that Jesus did not actually say this, the statement itself coming from some lesser voice. Compare Plummer (*Matthew*, 183):

There is no doubt that ver. 40 is part of the original text of this Gospel; it is absent from no MS. no version. But there is good reason for believing that it was no part of Christ's reply on this occasion. 1. It is not in Lk. 11:29-32. 2. It does not fit the context, which speaks of preaching producing repentance and is in no way concerned with the Resurrection. 3. It would not be intelligible to Christ's

hearers, who knew nothing of His future Resurrection. 4. The parallel drawn between Jonah and Christ is not true. . . . But the facts will not justify the statement that Christ's body was "three days and *three nights*" in the grave. . . . The verse may be a gloss which got into the authority which Mt. used; or it may be an insertion made by Mt. himself on the supposition that Christ's mention of Jonah referred to him as a type of the Resurrection. . . .

But to deal with these arguments in detail it is necessary to observe that:

1. While admitting for sake of argument that these two passages are parallel, the fact that this statement (Mt. 12:40) is not in Luke 11:29-32 is no argument against its being reported by the eyewitness Matthew as over against Luke who was not present. And were even both men present to hear Jesus' original reply, it does not follow that both would agree on a verbatim citation, as even a superficial examination of thousands of parallel synoptic Gospel texts reveals. However, it is debatable whether they be even parallel reports of the same event.
2. The context speaks not merely of preaching producing repentance, but specifically of this captious demand for a sign, hurled at Jesus. This, and nothing else, is what called forth this answer of Jesus. Contrary to that skeptical mentality that refuses to admit the objective reality of any supernatural events, the Jewish mentality requires that a sign consist in some prediction which can not be manipulated by the one giving it, nor which can be foreseen or presupposed by normal human sagacity or foresight, i.e. that it be specifically supernatural in character. So the sign does not lie in some supposed contrast between the preaching of Jonah which produced the repentance of the Ninevites on the one hand, and the preaching of Jesus Christ which resulted in the impenitence of the unbelieving Jews, on the other. This, because the impenitence of the Jewish nation as a whole was already a foregone conclusion. If not, the standard procedure through Jewish history was the brutal rejection and murder of the living prophets and the hypocritical glorification of the dead ones. (Cf. Mt. 23:29, 30) So, from a practical standpoint, there could be no sign, nothing supernatural, in predicting their refusal to repent. To think so is to ignore all that the

- Jews really intended to convey by their demand for a sign.
3. To speak of Jesus' future resurrection so those hearers would perhaps be unintelligible, but so what? Perhaps they would be unable to foresee the mechanics of that event, but what does their inability prove about the right or propriety of revealing otherwise unknowable truth? That is what revelations are for! Did Nicodemus instantly comprehend the new birth when Jesus tried to capitalize on that rabbi's confession that "You are a Teacher come from God"? Rather than let Jesus teach him as One possessed of the requisite authority to reveal otherwise unknowable truth, Nicodemus began to argue against what he could not immediately comprehend, since, to him, the mechanics of the rebirth were quite unclear. No, the objection here is based upon the prejudice that God cannot reveal to man what he does not already know or what does not immediately appeal to his intelligence as right and proper. Even the Apostles themselves, before the resurrection actually occurred, stumbled at the clearest, unfigurative explanations of this event, but that did not hinder Jesus from continuing His patient efforts to reveal it to them. (Cf. 16:21-23; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19)
 4. The objection, that sees the parallel between the experience of Jesus and Jonah as fundamentally false, since in no sense can it be said that the body of Jesus lay in the tomb a full "three days and three nights," is based upon the mistaken notion that this phrase is literal and, hence, to be considered the most precise expression of the schedule of events governing the Last Week of Jesus' life. But that this phrase is not in any sense literal nor intended strictly to govern the time schedule for the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord is proved by the following considerations:
 - a. If we must understand Jesus literally here, we must also expect Him to prophesy His own resurrection elsewhere as taking place "on the FOURTH day," if He is to remain in the tomb literally three days and three nights, no more and no less. But this He never says. It is always "on the third day" or "after three days," which are two exactly parallel statements of a Hebrew idiom, as a careful analysis of the various Synoptic texts will verify. (Cf. Mt. 16:21 and Lk. 9:22 with Mt. 8:31; Mt. 17:23 with Mk. 9:31; Mt. 20:19 and Lk. 18:33 with Mk.

10:34; also Lk. 24:7, 46 and Jn. 2:13) Surely Jesus Himself understood His own language when He explained elsewhere to His disciples what He meant here when put under pressure by the scribes to furnish them a sign. Therefore, unless we are to accuse the Lord of self-contradiction, we must permit Him the usual liberties to use language as men normally use it and we must look elsewhere (other than to a literal meaning) for the correct interpretation.

- b. One possible explanation of these seemingly precise words is that we have here in idiomatic Jewish usage which must be interpreted according to Jewish patterns of speech and not by the way Gentiles use the same words. Study of the following passages in their contexts will reveal that the Semitic mind habitually expressed time sequences in relatively precise language whereas only an approximate time element is intended. (Cf. Gen. 42:17, 18; Esther 4:15-17; 5:1; 1 Kg. 12:5, 12; 20:29; 1 Sam. 30:12, 13; cf. even Cornelius' manner of reckoning time, Ac. 10:3-30. Or is the entire account retold from the Semitic standpoint of Peter or some other who served as Luke's informant?) Thus, this usage among the Hebrews of counting a part of a day for a whole day really existed. Further, the chronology of Jewish kings is notoriously problematic due to the habit (to us, frustrating) of counting a part of a year for an entire year. While this usage is perhaps strange to the western ear, this strangeness does not cancel its real existence in Semitic speech patterns. Taken in this sense, then, Jesus is speaking as a typical Semite when He says "three days and three nights," but means no more than "sometime within a period of three days more or less."
- c. Another possible explanation of these seemingly precise words is the fact that this expression is part of a sign, or a prophecy of things that must come to pass in the future, and like all prophecies, must be handled according to the normal exegetical rules governing the proper interpretation of prophecies. One such rule most pertinent here is that the sign, or prophecy, must be interpreted in the light of its actual fulfillment and not on the basis of any meaning attached to its words that would disregard

that fulfilment. This same prophecy, or sign, was stated literally elsewhere. (See under 4a above.)

- d. Jesus' Jewish enemies understood Him to mean less than 72 hours. (Mt. 27:62-64) Their testimony to the meaning of this expression is invaluable in that they were the most interested in seeing the failure of what they considered the most iniquitous imposture, and yet it was to this very class that Jesus addressed the sign in question in precisely the language recorded by Matthew.
- e. Luke names the days involved in the Last Week schedule of the death, burial and resurrection as "Friday (*paraskeuè*, translatable as "preparation" for some festival day, as here, the Sabbath, or rendered as the normal Greek word for Friday), Saturday (the Sabbath), and Sunday (the first day of the week). See Lk. 23:54—24:1. Matthew, though less obviously, is just as clear: "evening" after Jesus' crucifixion (Mt. 27:57), "Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation" (Mt. 27:62) or "sabbath" (28:1) and "first day of the week" (Mt. 28:1). Similarly, Mark follows much the same pattern: Mk. 15:42; 16:1, 2, as does John 19:31, 42; 20:1).

The great obstacle in question is not whether the story of Jonah be credible and worthy of God or not, for Jesus' authority vouches for its authenticity. The insurmountable problem lies in trying to prove that OT account to be anything but true history. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 61) argues that "if the story of Jonah is not history, it is, of course, a piece of fiction . . . which originated in the brain of an Israelite." But that this alternative is itself even more incredible than the view it is invented to supplant, is proven by the following considerations suggested by McGarvey:

1. "It is incredible . . . that any Israelite, capable of conceiving and of writing such a story, would be so irreverent toward one of the great prophets of his nation as to make him act the part ascribed to Jonah . . .
2. "It is still more incredible that the leaders of the chosen people at any period of their history would have allowed such a document a place among their sacred books . . .
3. "No Israelite, inventing a story of God's dealings with a great Gentile city like Nineveh, would have represented him as being so regardful of the welfare of its people, so quick to forgive their sins, and so tenderly mindful of the innocent within its

walls. Especially would no Israelite write a story whose culminating point was a stern rebuke of his nation for animosity toward an oppressive heathen power. . . .

4. "This incredibility is intensified when we consider the date assigned to the Book of Jonah by those who hold it to be fictitious. . . . A Jew of a later age would be the last man on earth to invent a story showing tender regard for (Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire) on the part of Israel's God. . . . The farther down the stream of time you bring the date of the book, the more incredible that it could have obtained the place which we know it did obtain in the sacred writings of the Jews."

While their arguments are largely based upon psychological probabilities, which in no sense can be considered mathematically certain however likely they may seem, and so could be rejected as hypotheses contrary to fact, still the canonization of Jonah's book by Jewish leaders is a fact, a fact that is explicable only on the hypothesis that its history was objectively too true and documented to permit them the right to reject it.

In the heart of the earth need mean no more than **within the earth**, since it is a common expression used without its literal signification. (Cf. Dt. 4:11; Ezek. 27:4, 25ff.; Jon. 2:3; Ps. 46:2) Nothing is here affirmed of the depth of Jesus' future entombment nor of the exact location of Hades, but simply the reality of that burial. It does not really matter whether He means simply the grave of Joseph of Arimathea or Hades, because for the purpose of the sign, the meaning is the same. (Cf. Lk. 23:43; Ac. 2:27, 31; Eph. 4:9; I Pet. 3:19?)

D. JESUS' CONDEMNATION WELL GROUNDED (12:41, 42)

1. NINEVITES HEARD ONLY THE PROPHET JONAH (12:41)

12:41 **The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it.** If God be the Judge, how is it true that ancient pagans could be said to **condemn** anyone? In the sense that anyone who fulfills what is required of all, condemns those who fail to do what was in their power, because the former prove that all **COULD** have done their duty and that any who do not do so are left without excuse for their failure. In this case the duty, required of both **the men of Nineveh** and the Jews of **this generation** in which Jesus lived, was repentance. God is still the Judge and He will be justified in the verdict He

renders against the unrepentant Jews by the fact that the Ninevites proved that repentance toward God is both humanly possible and the right reponse of the generosity of God.

But why would the Ninevites condemn this generation? Because Christ's preaching was based upon far better attested evidence than that of Jonah's. Did God accompany Jonah's ministry with the variety and abundance of undoubted supernatural evidences of the divine authority of his message, as He had done for His Son? If not, those Gentile Ninevites had far more reason to demand signs of that foreign prophet from a tiny subject kingdom than did this generation of God's chosen people, nevertheless those godless pagans repented and this nation of "God-fearing" Jews did not. Apparently the men of Nineveh received the marvelous story of Jonah's deliverance as sign enough and proof enough that he truly spoke for the living God, so they believed his message. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 56) imaginatively fills out the picture thus:

When he began to cry out in the streets of Nineveh, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' the question necessarily went from lip to lip, Who is this? The answer, that it was the great prophet of Israel, by whose supernatural foresight the victories of Jeroboam, running through a period of forty years, had been won, was enough to arrest solemn attention; but when it was added that on first receiving the command to come and utter this cry, he tried to escape the task by running away, and sailing far out upon the sea, but that Jehovah, who had given the command, overtook him, brought him back in the bowels of a fish, cast him out alive on dry land, and then renewed the command, this added tenfold power to the word of the prophet.

The Ninevites' honesty in receiving the sign and preaching offered them, however limited the number of signs and sermons, was still Gentile honesty, because it originated outside the pale of Jewish advantages and enlightenment. But the Jewish response to Jesus, coming as it did from a people endowed with four thousand years of rich history of the wonderful dealings of the living God, a people who, rather than face up to the moral responsibility required of them by the abundance and variety of signs provided them in support of the message of Jesus of Nazareth, would dare to demand some proof of His authority, can be described as nothing less than callous dishonesty and moral irresponsibility! God's standard of judgment here, as everywhere, is: "According to the light against which you have

sinned will be your judgment." (Cf. Lk. 12:47, 48; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jas. 4:17. Study other examples of Jesus' use of the superior quality of Gentiles' response to God despite great handicaps, in order to throw into greater contrast Jewish unbelief notwithstanding their excellent opportunities to know God and do far better. Mt. 8:10-12; cf. 15:22-28; Lk. 11:32; 13:23-30; 17:11-19; Mt. 21:43; 22:1-14. See also the examples where pagan cities, because of lack of opportunities, will be punished with less severity than privileged Jewish cities who knew Jesus: Mt. 10:15; 11:22-24; Lk. 10:12, 14.)

The men of Nineveh . . . shall condemn this generation. Here is further evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus' message, proof that He does not intend to express the aspiration of His age, for, instead of picturing the nation of Israel as standing in judgment of the Gentiles, He affirms that these Gentiles will condemn the Jews. Our limited knowledge of rabbinic thought current in Jesus' day does not permit us to pontificate about all the views of His contemporaries. However, we may timidly ask where was the rabbi that dared raise his voice to take so radical a view of Jewish culpability, as does Jesus here? We ask this, since we do not know who would have been spiritually mature enough as to be able to conceive an idea so inimical to all that Maccabeanism and its spiritual children stood for.

Further, Jesus clearly sees the outcome of judgment that only Jehovah could know with certainty. Who is this that dares place His own people on the balances with those penitent pagans only to find Israel condemned? Who is this that sees the outcome of the proclamation of His own death and resurrection so clearly as to be able to warn His people that the Jews of that age would reject that future sign and thus seal their fate?

They repented at the preaching of Jonah (*metenōēsan eis tò kérugma Ionâ*) "Faith-only" groups who would deny any connection between obedience to Christ in Christian baptism and remission of sins hope to sustain this theory by appeal to this passage and Lk. 11:32 as evidence for a special use of the Greek preposition *eis*. *Eis* is used in Ac. 2:38 in the phrase "for remission of sins" (*eis âfesin tôn hamartiôn*) where most translators render the phrase: "for the remission, in order to receive forgiveness, so that your sins will be forgiven, etc." But since those, who exaggerate the *sola fede* principle as to exclude baptism from the plan of salvation, must dispose of the damaging evidence of such texts on salvation as Ac. 2:38; they think themselves to have found in the Greek phrase the solution to their quandary. Upon superficial examination of our texts (i.e. Mt. 12:41

and Lk. 11:32), it would seem that evidence for some other translation of the Greek preposition might have been discovered.

It is argued that the Ninevites repented *eis tò kérugma Ionâ*, i.e. "because of the preaching of Jonah." Therefore, it is said, it is proper to translate Ac. 2:38 in harmony with the "faith only" view as follows: "Repent . . . and be baptized . . . because of the forgiveness of your sins," i.e. because your sins have been forgiven. That there is a causal use of the preposition *eis* is affirmed by grammarians and lexicographers, as, for example, Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 104; Robertson and Davis, *New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 256; Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 227-229. However the best evidence upon which they affirm the causal use of *eis* is based principally upon Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:32. The weakness of this evidence lies in the fact that it ignores the usual meaning assigned to the word *kérugma*: "proclamation, announcement, preaching." (Arndt-Gingrich, 432) Nouns ending in *-ma* are regularly and primarily considered the result of the action implied in the verb from which they are formed. (Chamberlain, *Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 12) Thus, the *kérugma* of Jonah was not the action of preaching, but "the thing preached" by him, i.e. the message itself. While it is historically true that the Ninevites repented because Jonah preached to them (Jonah 3:5-10), this is not a proper translation of what Jesus said. Rather, Jesus said, ". . . for they turned to the message preached by Jonah . . ." (Mt. 12:41 and Lk. 11:32, Charles B. Williams's translation. Or, as Plummer (*Luke*, 307, 308) has it: "*In accordance with the preaching' they repented; i.e. they turned towards it and conformed to it; compare . . . 2 Tim. 2:26; or else, 'out of regard to it' they repented.*" That the repentance of the Ninevites was directed *toward (eis)* a definite end which formed the form and substance of Jonah's message is well-known. (Consider other examples of this use of *eis*: Jn. 3:16-19, 36; 1:12; 2:11, 23; 6:29, 35, 40; Ac. 10:43; 14:23; 19:4; 20:21; 24:24; Ro. 10:9, 10; Ac. 20:21; 2 Tim. 2:25; Ac. 26:18; 11:18; Lk. 24:47) Thus a well-meant attempt to prove that Peter meant "be baptized because your sins have already been forgiven" fails of necessary proof, because it cannot be sustained from our present text. The repentance of the Ninevites was their definite move *toward (eis)*, their willing entrance *into (eis)* harmony with all that was the burden of Jonah's message. Whereas their former conduct had led them to turn their backs upon righteousness, sobriety and fear of God, the kind of conduct which was the very opposite to that which Jonah's oracle

proclaimed, their repentance was their personal commitment to (*eis*) all the moral implications that his *kérugma* demanded.

Behold, a greater than Jonah is here. (Cf. this saying with 12:6 with which Matthew places it in context. Is *pleōn*, "more," different in practical emphasis from *meizon*, "greater"?) Lenski (*Matthew*, 495) is right to notice that the "neuter *pleōn* includes everything the Jews had in Christ." Jesus is claiming that right in the presence of these dishonest critics and prejudiced authorities was something far more important, **something of greater proportions than Jonah.** Whereas the neuter **something** might tend to draw the mind to the many, convincing signs that had characterized His ministry, or perhaps to the ministry itself, the very mention of the man **Jonah** as the standard of comparison brings us back to the unstated implication: "I, Jesus, am greater than that inspired prophet whose message called forth from his pagan audience the most amazing demonstration of repentance!" He is fully justified in severely censuring His own people, since He had already proven Himself, beyond any reasonable doubt, to be superior to the great prophets of the past to whom these Pharisees gave full honors and yet pretended to be unable to recognize the proper Messianic identity and dignity of Jesus.

2. THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH HEARD ONLY SOLOMON (12:42)

12:42 **The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.** This is obviously a second example reinforcing the point stated in the foregoing illustration, and, as such, becomes the historical validation of those OT texts. (1 Kg. 10:1-13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12) Here again the same arguments are valid that were used in reference to the historicity of Jonah, for, had the Pharisees been able to deny that the Queen of the South ever came to Palestine to visit Solomon, or that Solomon really never possessed his fabled wisdom, then they could also have retorted: "Your claim to possess a wisdom superior to that of Solomon is an empty boast."

The Queen of the South had received authentic, though somewhat partial, news of Solomon's wisdom. Her felt need, her longing for greater wisdom than she possessed, was sufficient to cause her to make the long, arduous journey, ignoring the hardships, dangers, time and expense involved, to hear him. Her diligence in seeking out that wisdom stands in bold contrast to the attempted neutrality and cold indifference of Jesus' own people. She was also outside the

influence of the Mosaic economy, hence, not blessed with the enormous advantages and opportunities to know God as did the chosen people. Therefore, even though it was the famed wisdom of Solomon that drew her, by which the Lord glorified Himself in him, and even though she felt compelled to exclaim her praise for Jehovah his God for His love for Israel that had placed such a man on the throne, yet there is no impelling evidence in the OT record that she was converted to Hebrew monotheism, since her "acknowledgement of Jehovah as Israel's God, was reconcilable with polytheism." (Keil, *Kings*, 160) And this is what we would expect of her: that she return to her own realm with serious doubts about her former paganism, that she live up to the light available to her. In the record she speaks consistently of Jehovah as "your God," as if she did not claim Him as her own. (Cf. 1 Kg. 10:9; 2 Chron. 9:8)

The wisdom of Solomon, the point of comparison here, was of a practical sort, the best human psychology for excellent human relations. But its origin was a God-given gift that manifested itself in the finest practical philosophy man has yet seen. This is at the same time its greatness and its limitation, since it was not particularly presented as a divine revelation to save men from their sins. There were definite religious overtones and a positively religious basis, but Solomon sought his psycho-sociological orientation within the religious framework of the Mosaic system. (Study *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* to sense this.) The most religious maxims in his work presuppose a complete religious system explained elsewhere.

With this view of **the Queen of the South** and of **the wisdom of Solomon**, we begin to discern that the second illustration is not exactly equal to the first. Rather, Jesus has moved, with excellent rhetorical effect, to an illustration involving a pagan who, though deeply moved by her contact with Hebrew monotheism, apparently did not become converted to it, in contrast with the Ninevites who actually repented. Further, in contrast to the preaching of a divinely inspired message by Jonah, we have in this illustration only the **wisdom of Solomon**. As a seeker after truth and as an expounder of great wisdom and knowledge, **Solomon and the Queen of the South** make an excellent point of contrast where-with Jesus may censure His own privileged age. Solomon's truly great erudition was so far inferior to the grand revelations of Him who is the Wisdom of God personified, and yet God's own people could not recognize that same Wisdom right in their midst, in their own land! And, as will be discussed in connection with Jesus' use of parables to hide truth about the Kingdom while, at the same time

revealing it, we see that the Jews in general did not take the trouble to understand what was not clear and well-founded in the message of Christ. They just wrote Him off as a religious fanatic. Despite their great advantages to know by personal investigation, they just did not care that much about truth.

Greater than Solomon: on the neuter *pleion* see on 12:41 and on *metron* at 12:6. Here again the neuter (*pleion*) speaks of all that Christ represented to the Jewish people. He had been laying before them the eternal wisdom of God and they did nothing, but scorn it. But that ancient queen condemns not only those unbelievers, but all who cannot discern in this young rabbi from Nazareth "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Co. 2:3) nor see in the face of Christ "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." (2 Co. 4:4, 6)

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from Jesus' words is that every man is judged according to the light against which he has sinned. What would the Lord say to the Twentieth Century? "You have enjoyed even greater opportunities to investigate the truth, granted the historical perspective of twenty centuries. The Christians who lived out their lives in the early years of the Church and sought out the truth, with far less advantages that you, will rise up in judgment against your generation to the very extent that it does not live up to its privileges and the knowledge of God's will that it could have obtained." Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 56) rightly concludes that "in Jesus we are confronted with God; and the one real question in life is: 'What is our reaction when we are confronted with God in Jesus Christ?'" Do we see in Him a revelation of God greater than the inspired prophets of the Old Testament, a wisdom greater than the wisest man who has ever lived? Do we bend every effort to know the truth, regardless of the expense involved, and then, having found it, submit to it, even to the extent of the humiliation of repentance?

E. WARNING: THE DANGER OF THE UNCOMMITTED LIFE (12:43-45)

Earlier (11:16-19), Jesus had described the moral caliber of His generation by dramatizing them as fickle children playing in the marketplace whom no one could satisfy. Here His tone is graver as He likens them to a demonized man! (Cf. Lk. 11:24-26) This is a parable illustrating the fundamental impossibility of neutrality, indecision and inaction where truth can be known and when that truth requires a positive response. The text for this story may well

be 12:30 (Cf. Lk. 11:23 as context for this same illustration.)

But the unclean spirit (cf. Mt. 10:1; Mk. 1:23; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; Lk. 4:33; 6:18; 9:42) **When he is gone out of the man:** by what instrumentality the demon leaves his victim, Jesus does not say. Since the demon thinks himself free to return to his old habitation (12:44) and proves his thesis correct (12:45), we might conclude that the demon was not cast out by Jesus, for His stern rebuke, given in the case of the demonized boy, specifically forbade the demon's return. (Cf. Mk. 9:25) Considering the completeness of Jesus' cures, many presume His practice to have been uniform and His attitude the same at all other times. On the other hand, demons are not notoriously obedient to the will of God however expressed. Further, the very prohibition of the demon's return in the case cited suggests that, had Jesus not so spoken, the demon would have returned. **Passeth through waterless places: why waterless?** Is this an example of Jesus' accommodation of His language to a popular superstition connected with contemporary demonology? Or is He actually revealing something that demons really do? (Cf. Isa. 34:14; Baruch 4:35; Tobit 8:3) Concerning this problematic expression McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 15) wrote:

While it would be hazardous to make it the 'basis of a demonology for which he is to be held responsible,' he certainly is to be held responsible for the remark itself. If an evil spirit, when he left a man, did not frequent waterless places, I should be glad to learn from Professor T. what kind of places he did frequent.

The critics are thus forced by Jesus' assertion to prove that demons do NOT in fact frequent arid areas, in order to demonstrate His words as mere accommodation to popular demonologies. The present state of their knowledge of demons does not permit them such pontifical powers. They too are dependent upon the Gospel narratives for much of their information on this subject and merely betray an unscientific bias when they begin arbitrarily to sift out what information seems to suit their preconceived notions as to what can be true about demons. **Seeking rest and finding it not** may be just part of the scenery of the parable and intended to reveal nothing about the spirit world. It serves to explain why the unclean spirit wanted to return to his old habitat. But this rigidly limited information does not permit us to speculate further about the mentality or habits of demons.

It might well be questioned whether Jesus intends to provide us

a rudimentary lesson in demonology while teaching on an entirely different subject, and not rather a simple parable the details of which are not to be pressed to provide information on demons. That this is a parable is clear not only from the moral indicated at its close, but also from its application to the Jewish unbelievers. But to describe this story as a "parable," does not need to imply that what Jesus says about demons therein must, therefore, be impossible or incorrect so far as it goes. Even though this information may not have been offered to provide some insight into demonology, nevertheless it could have been just as much to Jesus' purpose to give us correct information on demons as to invent a fable to teach His truth, even though fables function remarkably well to reveal a truth. The Lord knows better than anyone then or now how demons act and is probably speaking accordingly in this parable. If He did not speak in harmony with reality, we cannot know it and He certainly missed an excellent opportunity to cast some light onto that dark page of spiritual reality. Granted, His major thrust has nothing to do with demonology, but with what is the fundamental meaning and application of this story, i.e., the empty heart of a Judaism purified but uncommitted. But though this is admittedly a question of probabilities and not one of certainties, yet, until we are prepared to demonstrate the details of Jesus' story to be unrealistic in their portrayal of demonic thought or behavior, we remain dependent upon His words for any information we have.

The man who is the victim of the demon's caprice is **this evil generation** (12:45), so what happens to him is but a picture of the vicissitudes of Jesus' contemporaries who were even then rejecting Him. The fortunes of the demonized man represent the nation under the present spiritual domination of the scribes and Pharisees and the party bosses of the other movements and parties competing for the attention of the nation. Because Jesus' mention of **the last state of the man** (12:45) suggests an earlier period when lesser evils plagued him, and as this last stage of his condition coincided with **this evil generation**, it is necessary to recognize the historical precedents that lay the groundwork for his later condition. A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, Synoptic Gospels, 193) thinks that:

It is not at all likely that Christ's view was limited to the period dating from John's ministry. Moral laws need large spaces of time for adequate exemplification. The most instructive exemplification of the degeneracy described is supplied by the period from Ezra till Christ's time. With Ezra

was ended *material* idolatry. But from that period dates the reign of legalism, which issued in Rabbinism, a more subtle and pernicious idolatry of the *letter*, the more deadly that it wore the fair aspect of zeal for God and righteousness.

Jesus is painting the outlines of Jewish history in which the nation has been liberated of its bent for idolatry since the time of the Babylonian exile and remained free from its allurements during the Maccabean revival. But this temporary repentance from the worship of wooden gods was merely succeeded by a reverence for the letter of God's law which proved so fatal to the true spirit of the worship and true service of God. Into the shrine, emptied of its idolatries, had swept the Pharisean scrupulosity and Sadducean liberalism, Herodian worldliness, the unrealism of the Essenes and the nationalistic bigotry of the Zealots, all so much more deadly because the old gods had been merely substituted by anything but submission to God. Is the superficial repentance and revival partially a reference to the flurry of religious activity promoted by the disciples of John the Baptist who had not also become disciples of the Christ? Is there also a reference here to the activity of Jesus, intended to bless and free Israel from the very evils to which it must necessarily fall victim when **this evil generation** will finally crucify Him who is their last hope?

12:44 **Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out.** The demon still considers it his own dwelling, as God had not been invited in to occupy every room in it. **My house**, as a phrase, does not decide the question whether the demon has been driven out, for he could still describe his former habitation this way, even if driven out, especially if he suspected it yet empty of occupancy since his departure.

And when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. **Empty** (*scholazonta*, "unoccupied, standing empty"), not occupied by any compelling force, not positively committed to any cause, neutral. Why should Israel remain uncommitted to the will of God in the face of the great issues with which it was continually faced?

1. The man on the street was probably too absorbed in the every day business of making a living to concern himself seriously in seeking out and submitting himself to the truth.
2. Others, confused by the great debates between the learned rabbis, may have excused themselves on the basis of theological incompetence and so left it to the experts.
3. Yet others, seeing the truth and admitting that Jesus was right,

were afraid to take an unpopular stand.

4. Others may have desired merely to be left alone, since they wished to be undisturbed by hard decisions.
5. Some may have begun to grasp the spirit of adventure involved in the spiritual messiahship of Christ, but preferred the security of the old ways, rather than launch out taking the risks required by the adventure.

There were probably as many reasons as there were people who held back and, for one reason or another, did not bow to the will of God in Jesus Christ. But in all these excuses there is one common element. Morgan (*Matthew*, 135) describes this spiritual vacuum in the heart of Israel: "There was no indweller, possessing, holding, mastering . . ." (Contrast with this state of affairs: Ro. 8:9; 1 Co. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Co. 6:16; Eph. 2:21, 22; Jn. 14:23.) Jesus' criticism cuts to the heart of Judaism: "Your religion has only made you empty; it cannot fill you. It leaves you the easy victim of any power that can fill that vacuum!"

Swept clean of all the repulsive foulness of idolatry and heathenism. **Garnished** (*kekosmēménon*, Arndt-Gingrich, 445: "1. Put in order; 2. Adorn, decorate."), but not filled. Decorated with the external beauty of Pharisaic devotion to the study and practice of the letter of the Law, the nation was living an outwardly reformed life characterized by empty virtue and hypocrisy and hollow ceremonies. God is not there, the only One who could have successfully resisted Satan. (Cf. 12:29)

12:45 **Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.** A total of eight spirits is not unusual, since the Gospel writers describe cases of multiple demonization. (Lk. 8:2; Mk. 5:9=Lk. 8:30) **Spirits more evil:** what could be more repulsive, more foul than idolatry? Pride, unbelief, fanaticism, greed, self-righteousness, formalism, hypocrisy and, worst of all, rejection of Israel's Messiah! It must be noted here that Jesus never confuses demon-possession for sinfulness, nor does He ever identify demons simply with sins or even temptations to sin. Let us not make that mistake either. Nevertheless, it is very true that the basic teaching of this parable, which speaks exclusively of real demons as the basis of comparison, may find splendid application in reference to the vacuous religious life out of which certain evil practices have been removed without transforming the resulting idleness into positive Christian activity that leaves no room nor time for evil because filled with all

the fulness of God. **Dwell there** (*katoikeē*): just as God is said to dwell in the Temple, i.e. make His permanent abode there (cf. Mt. 23:21, *katoikōsmēnē*), so these demons wander no longer, but take full possession of their victim. There is nothing said here of a forced entry into the dwelling, since there is everything about the house to invite habitation and nothing to prohibit it. The first demon did not need the others to help him force an entrance, nor are they described as being especially "stronger than he." They are only **more evil than he**.

And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. This sentence is the turning point in the Lord's parable, belonging as well to the application as to the story itself. Vicious evils, both more in number and virulence than those once repented of, can take over the unfilled life. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:20; Jn. 5:14; Heb. 6:6; 10:26f.) And with these evils, of course, comes the attendant responsibility and greater guilt. (Jn. 15:22-24) **Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation.** While this statement, stated in the future tense, menaces a dreadful future, there is still opportunity to repent. Plummer (*Matthew*, 185) observes:

They have not reached this desperate condition yet, but they are in danger of it, and some of them will reach it. The warning is similar to that about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which He does not say that they have committed, although they were near it.

But this hope is almost academic, since the very nature of this spiritual hardness practically eliminates the possibility that Israel would yet turn to God in any great numbers. **This evil generation** (*ē geneā tautē tē ponērā*) is no merely technical, eschatological term referring to the entire Hebrew race clear down to the last trumpet. On the contrary, it is a practical expression that precisely pinpoints Jesus' accusation upon the Jews then living and rejecting the real life and hope He was even then offering. (Cf. Mt. 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 17:17; 16:4; 23:36; 24:34; Lk. 11:29-32, 50, 51; 17:25; 21:32) **This generation** means those people who, with the living lessons of Hebrew religion before their eyes and with the echo of the voice of John the Baptist ringing in their ears, had merely cleaned up their lives superficially, removing only the grosser, cruder sins of the flesh but leaving untouched the sins of the spirit and the depleted spiritual power and untenanted temple of their hearts. They had not surrendered the habitation and control of their life to its rightful Owner. (Study Malachi 3) By leaving the word **generation** general

and unapplied, the Lord leaves the hearer free to feel its implications either in the formal expression of the Jewish life and religion or in his own personal emptiness before God. By attacking Judaism at its best and finding it wanting, Jesus' own message stands out as the only true alternative. Thus, the Lord has met the opposition by claiming that His teaching was absolutely essential to fill human need, leaving no place for the return of the vileness that had so permeated its existence before. This is a clear claim to absolute religious authority, if not to Deity itself, because, after all, who could speak with such finality about the whole generation of which he is a part and be unable to find any redeeming feature in its people, its priesthood, its government, its religion, its popular ideals, its practical ethics and its national hopes? The Lord had already explained His charge. (Cf. 12:39 Notes) That **evil generation** felt the full blow of Jesus' condemnation when God permitted the Romans to destroy them to the uttermost within just a few short years after this pronouncement, never to rise again for nearly two millenia. (1 Th. 2:16)

It is interesting to observe that this vigorous battle of ideas began with the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus was demon-possessed (Mk. 3:22, 30), but Jesus does not terminate it without first proving conclusively that the Jews themselves were so very much like a man repossessed by eight vicious demons! But this is no mere tit for tat rebuttal or name-calling, because Jesus can see the true nature of His people more clearly than any other contemporary observer. But He is no Judge to remain in the ivory tower of heaven to condemn but a compassionate Savior who labored incessantly to save that very generation! Instead of complacency and self-justification, we find in Him that deep concern and pained patriotism that longs for the salvation of these very opponents who refuse to see that their very accusation itself is symptomatic of the disease which they believe to diagnose in Him.

From the Master's application of His parable, we are able to discern profound lessons for ourselves, suggested by Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 57):

1. The mere removal of a few of the fouler, more repulsive sins of which we are guilty, and the temporary victories over Satan, must not be confused for the final, decisive triumph over sin. So long as self is alive in the individual, the evil once banished from his life has not yet been destroyed. This is why the total filling of one's life with all the fulness

of Christ is so very important. (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17-19)

2. Out of the foregoing comes the observation that mere negative religion can never suffice to hold virulent evil at bay. Those whose piety consists entirely of the observance of God's prohibitions are only half-armed against the assaults of Satan whose delight is unbounded when he can convince anyone that doing nothing is as good and useful for the promotion of godliness as doing positive acts of useful helpfulness to others.
3. Consequently, the Church that would keep her converts permanently saved from sin will find this task easy in proportion to her success in giving them Christian work to do.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the position of the scribes and Pharisees in Judaism, showing the theoretic reasonableness of the request they made of Jesus.
2. Explain why Jesus' refusal to comply with their request is more reasonable than the request itself.
3. Explain why Jesus complied with their request, even though He had sufficient grounds for refusing.
4. In what way was Jonah "a sign" to the Ninevites? Does Luke 11:30 relate here?
5. In what way, was Jesus to be "a sign" to His generation?
6. Narrate briefly the story of Jonah's ministry to Ninevah showing the relevance of Jesus' use of that experience as proof of His identity. In what respect is the sign that Jesus offers the scribes and Pharisees similar to Jonah's experience?
7. Explain the judicial principle involved in the fact that both the Ninevites and the Queen of the South will "stand up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it." How is it possible for one group of human beings to condemn another group of people, all of which are imperfect?
8. What is that "something greater than" either Jonah or Solomon? Did Jesus intend two separate items that in each case are greater than the two men named, or did He mean one item of surpassing value, illustrated from two separate angles? Are there other possible translations of this phrase that shed a different light on the meaning? Why is this "something" actually greater?
9. What "generation" was the object of Jesus' condemnation of "this generation"?

10. State the occasion upon which Jesus had spoken of His resurrection as a "sign" before this. Note whatever similarities may exist between the several situations in which He gave this sign.
11. Explain the Jewish usage involved in the phrases: "three days and three nights." What do the Gospel writers describe as the fulfilment of this expression?
12. Did Jesus fulfil the "sign of Jonah"? How? When?
13. How does the story of the seven demons in a beautiful apartment connect with Jesus' teaching on signs and on repentance?
14. What is repentance, as illustrated in the account of Jonah?
15. How much may be learned about demonology from the story of the demon here narrated? If nothing, why not? If so, what information is to be gained?
16. Explain how that generation of Jews was like the demon-possessed man.

Section 30

JESUS REFUSES TO ALLOW FLESHLY TIES TO BIND HIM

(Parallels: Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

TEXT: 12:46-50

46. While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak to him.
47. And one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to thee.
48. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?
49. And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren!
50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss Jesus' personal manner of life: Where was His home? What was His trade or craft? What means of support had He during His ministry? What were some of His personal habits or practices? How would you analyze Jesus of Nazareth as a human being? Do not try to dodge the issue by saying He is

incapable of analysis, even though you may have to revise your estimate many times and remain, finally, unsatisfied with your attempts. Take a long look at Jesus to see how you would have reacted to Him, had YOU lived in HIS family, in HIS town, had you been a part of His world.

- b. What does this text reveal about His relation to His family?
- c. What, do you think, was the purpose of Mary and His brothers in trying to talk with Jesus at precisely this time? Do you think their purpose was perfectly normal and neutral, a simple wish to be with this beloved Member of their family? Or, looking at the situation from Jesus' standpoint, do you decide that their purpose was hostile, a desire to save Him from the necessary, inevitable clashes and climax of His ministry? Is it important to know this in order to understand Jesus' refusal?
- d. What is the meaning of Jesus' response? Is He refusing to see Mary and His brothers? Is He refusing to claim kinship with them? What is the point of His obviously symbolical remark?
- e. What does this passage teach, if anything, on the subject of the possibility of Mary's becoming an intercessor between God and/or Jesus on the one hand, and sinners on earth, on the other?
- f. Do you think Jesus means to elevate every brother, sister or mother on earth to the same level with His earthly kinfolks? What is then important about whether He intended to do so or not?
- g. If you take the view that Jesus' kinfolks were intending to "save Him from Himself," hence were essentially hostile to the ministry He was performing, what is so very wrong with the request they made?
- h. Do you think Jesus ever gave Mary and His brothers the interview they sought? On what basis do you say this?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

While Jesus was still talking with the people about the accusation of His being in league with Satan and the theologians' demand for a sign of His authority to teach, His mother, Mary, and His brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, arrived at the crowded house where He was teaching. However, they could not get near Him, because of the people crowded all around Him. So they remained outside, requesting to speak with Him. They sent a messenger to Him to call Him: "Look, your mother and brothers are here, standing outside, asking to speak to you."

But Jesus sent them this answer, replying to the man who had

brought the message, "Who is really my mother? Who are really my brothers?"

Then looking round at that circle of faces all around Him, Jesus, with a sweeping motion of his arm pointed to His disciples, remarking: "Here are my real mother and brothers! You see, anyone who listens to God's Word and does what my heavenly Father wants, that person is really my brother, sister and mother! That is all the family I really recognize!"

SUMMARY

While Jesus was busy teaching, His physical family called Him to step aside to speak with them, since the crowd was too dense to permit their getting near Him. But Jesus refused to let family ties bind Him, since the only significant bond, as far as Jesus is concerned, is the tie of discipleship and obedience to God.

NOTES

I. REGARDFUL RECALL TO REPRESS RECKLESSNESS (12:46, 47)

12:46 While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak to him. While . . . speaking creates a definite link with the discourse that has just been recorded and provides a clue to explain this move made by Jesus' relatives. The total context of this episode is peculiarly illuminating! (Cf. Mt. 12:22-50 with Mk. 3:19-21, 31-35; Lk. 8:19-21) The events which lead up to this section, and perhaps motivate Mary and her sons to react as they do, are:

1. A busy ministry that permitted Jesus and His men no leisure even to partake of necessary food. (Mk. 3:20)
2. The vicious attacks by ecclesiastical spies from Jerusalem (Mk. 3:22; Mt. 12:24) Did this charge seem to have just enough truth back of it to convince His family that Jesus was becoming so absorbed in His work as to be losing His mental balance? Did this trigger their move to seize Him?
3. His own alarming language, so unique and audacious for Him whom they took to be simply their kinsman, may have prompted this action.

These factors make the solicitous care of His kinsfolk the more understandable: they wanted to save Jesus from Himself and from the dangers to which He seemed oblivious. (Mk. 3:21) And yet even

their misguided solicitousness for His health and safety make the situation, from which they would save Him, even more critical, for they are interfering with the directions and schedule of the Son of God! What may be surmised about the internal family connections of Jesus?

1. The real atmosphere of Jesus' former home life is apparently only good. Even though this interference on the part of Mary shows her failure to comprehend His mission, it does not betray distrust. Even if the assertion "He is beside Himself," is her secret fear and the brothers' open expression, it is not to be construed as a criticism, but as the anxious conviction of those who love Him.
2. This action of His brothers in united agreement does not prove anything one way or the other about their age in reference to the question as to their exact relationship to Jesus. (See "*The Brethren of the Lord*," special study after 13:54-58; also Mk. 6:3; Jn. 7:3-5; Ac. 1:15) *ISBE* (520) notes that:

When it is urged that their attempts to interfere with Jesus indicate a superiority which, according to Jewish custom, is inconsistent with the position of younger brothers, it may be answered that those who pursue an unjustifiable course are not models of consistency.

Lange (*Matthew*, 231) agrees that what is happening here is not the expression of an unbelief that deliberately rejects evidence, but rather the practical, however temporary, failure to be what the word "disciple" really requires of the one who wears that title:

They do not press through the crowd, nor lay violent hands on Him; they send a respectful message, and patiently await His answer. Besides, we find that some time afterward the brothers of Jesus are not of the opinion that He should not work at all, but rather ask Him to transfer the scene of His operations from Galilee to Judea, and openly to come forward before all the world (John 7:1, etc.). In this light the conduct of His family must be viewed. Their unbelief consisted not in doubting Him, but in imagining that it was theirs to preserve and direct Him by their worldly policy. Meyer is therefore mistaken when he maintains that the mother of Jesus was, at the time, not decided in her faith. Such

instances as the later suggestion of His brothers (John 7:1), the history of Peter (Matt. 16:23), that of Thomas (John 20), nay, that of all the disciples, prove that during the period of spiritual development prior to the Feast of Pentecost, there were seasons when even believers might for a time be unbelieving, *i.e.*, self-willed, and deficient in the spirit of full surrender to Christ.

However well-intentioned this interruption of Jesus' career, however highly motivated, it is nonetheless an interference and must not be tolerated. Worse still it is the sort of interruption in which Jesus' mother and brothers make their claims upon Him felt as their Relative. Had Mary forgotten those words that so early had begun to separate Him from her? (Lk. 2:49) Or that His earthly course was not to be dictated by His earthly, fleshly ties? (Jn. 2:4) Had these brethren known what surely their mother must have known, would they have been so quick to suppose they could counsel Him or teach Him wisdom or pretend to know what was best for Him or the movement He had set in motion? **Standing without.** Aside from the accidental circumstances which caused them to be outside, what were they doing there **standing without**, when they should have been inside listening to Him! Again, if even their own special relationship to Jesus gave the advantage of many private conversations with Him, by what right can they interrupt the lessons of others who heard Him gladly?

12:47 **And one said to him.** This almost accidental notice of the man who shouted to Jesus affords us insight into the informal teaching situation and atmosphere maintained by Jesus. The man felt he could interrupt the Lord without incurring censure. But the man, by his good services, is also contributing to that view of governments that promotes the competition and contrasts involved in hierarchy, dynasty, honors, position and authority. Even though he is simply trying to do a service for Jesus and His relatives, he unconsciously elevates these relatives above common disciples, since these latter can wait while questions important to the family are attended to. It is as if the very relationship which they enjoyed guaranteed them His attention prior to that for common followers. And even if none of this was intended by that generous, unknown person, it has since become the doctrine of an apostate Church and deserved to be dealt with immediately and decisively. This, Jesus does next.

II. REFINED REBUFF REJECTING THE REPROOF (12:48)

12:48 **But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?** Were Jesus merely human and a king of earthly governments, He might have been expected to stop His instruction, either make room for them to find special places in His audience until finished, or, in deference to their urgency or desire for privacy, go along with them. (Cf. 1 Kg. 2:19, 20) Instead, "The words of Jesus have the undoubted ring of conscious authority and express the determination of one who wills the control of His own life." (ISBE, 2002)

Though framed in the interrogative form, Jesus' question, uttered in all seriousness without even the faintest accent of scorn or satire, becomes the strongest kind of denial that family ties were more binding upon Him, or more important to Him, than spiritual relationships. In His own personal case He damns that old skeptical proverb: "Blood is thicker than water!" (= Family ties are more binding than those formed through one's baptismal relationship.) And the mentality of the people to whom this saying is directed renders it so much more poignant. The oriental concept of family solidarity had probably no more vigorous exponents than the Hebrews, since the reciprocal responsibilities of parents and children had been ingrained in them for centuries. Notwithstanding the many unfortunate exceptions to this fine rule, where family ties counted for little (cf. Micah 7:2-7; Jer. 9:4), nevertheless the concept of family was very highly developed among the Jews. (Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, chaps. VIII and IX.) Despite the background of His people and His own deep love for His kin, He must publicly deny what their request implied. Remember A. B. Bruce's sensitive comment (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, Synoptic Gospels, 194):

There are idealists, promoters of pet schemes, and religious devotees whom it would cost no effort to speak thus; not an admirable class of people. It did cost Jesus an effort, for He possessed a warm heart and unblighted affections.

But Jesus' denial, that physical bonds are somehow more important to Him than spiritual, has proved to be not only essential for Mary's understanding at the time, but also for His followers' instruction in all ages. PHC-22 (317) has it:

It certainly is no fault of Mary herself, whose name should ever be held in the highest respect by all who love the Lord, that a corrupt church, reversing all the teaching of the

church's Head, not only elevated the earthly relationship far above the spiritual, but in virtue of this relationship put the mother in the place of the Son, and taught an ignorant people to worship her and trust in her as a mediator. But the fact that this was done, and is persisted in to this day, shows that when our Lord set aside the mere earthly relationship as one that must be merged in the spiritual, He was correcting not only a pardonable error of Mary, but a most unpardonable error that afterwards, without any encouragement whatever from her, should be committed in her name.

That the Roman Catholic denomination persists in this error is demonstrated by the Documents of the Second Vatican Council in the following references: "The Liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) Chap. V, paragraph 103; "The Church" (*Lumen gentium*), Chap. II, par. 59; Chap. III, parr. 60-62, 66-69; "The Apostate of the Laity," (*Apostolicam actuositatem*), Chap. I, par 4; "Ministry and Sacerdotal Life," (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*), Chap. III, par. 18; "Missionary Activity," (*Ad Gentes*), Chap. III, par. 42. The Closing Speech, Third Session, 21 November 1964, contains the proclamation of Mary as "The Mother of the Church" and worthy of worship, as well as a prayer directed to Mary.

Jesus is the Master of interruptions! With perfect mastery He deals quickly with this badly-timed, wrong-headed interference caused by people who should have known better. Without hedging about His fleshly relation to His kin or without getting embarrassed with them for their presumption, Jesus not only does not scold them for putting this unnecessary pressure upon Him, but rather, He deftly fields their appeal and turns it into a superb opportunity to reveal what we needed to know about His kinship! Jesus was fast on His feet, because He was long on His knees: these answers came out of His communion with the Father. Study how the Master Orator, even in this preplexing situation, tosses this surprising question into the air to excite even greater interest in the answer. And this question, put in exactly this form, automatically drives the hearer to seek a profounder meaning to the terms **mother and brothers**.

III. RECOGNITION OF HIS REAL RELATIVES (12:49, 50)

12:49 And he stretched forth his hands towards his disciples and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren!
 12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister and mother.

His sweeping gesture heightens the dramatic effect of Jesus' question and draws even more interested attention to His answer. Lenski (*Matthew*, 503) feels this:

And while men's minds are still searching, and before they can center on a wrong answer, Jesus himself gives the terse, striking, perfect answer which, because of the way it is introduced, will the more remain fixed in the memory.

But what is the intent of Jesus' affirmation here?

1. Is it to censure His kinsmen for interrupting His teaching the Word of God? This may be implied, but it is not direct criticism. He knew they were spiritually ignorant as were so many other genuine friends and disciples, especially when, driven by the anxiety of their deep concern for Him, they say, "He is beside Himself!" (Mk. 3:21) But He could recognize a world of moral difference between their mistaken concern, even if it was prompted by misconceptions and partially by their imperfect faith, and that malignant, deliberately insulting judgment that snarls: "He has an unclean spirit!"
2. Is He denying the claim of all family ties under all circumstances? No, but He puts them to the test of discipleship. His dying thought is the responsibility for His mother's care. (Jn. 19:26, 27) His family relationship must have been of the very best sort, if He could use them as illustrations of His relation to God and His disciples. "Jesus would scarcely make use of the family symbolism to designate the sacred relationships of the Kingdom of heaven, while, at the same time, He was depreciating the value and importance of the very relationships which formed the basis of His analogy." (*ISBE*, 2002) Rather, He would have us see that the only hope of permanence for these ties beyond the horizons of this earth-life is that they be joined with the bonds of common discipleship in the Kingdom of God.
3. Is He merely using their appeal as an opportunity to point out those ties that are far higher and stronger than any fleshly bonds? Without despising His family, or requiring that His disciples do so with their own families, He simply puts God and His spiritual family first.

On spiritual kinship to Christ, consider the following texts: Ps. 22:22; Mt. 28:10; Jn. 20:17, 18; Ro. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-18; Mt. 10:35-57;

19:29; Jn. 1:13; 8:31-39 (cf. John's message, Mt. 3:7-10); Lk. 11:27, 28; 2:49; Jn. 2:4; Jn. 15:14; Jas. 1:22ff.; Eph. 2:19; Gal. 6:10; Ro. 9:6, etc.

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister and mother. Ironically, God is the way to Jesus Christ. Just as in other connections the Scriptures teach that men cannot make claims upon God unless they come through Jesus (1 Jn. 2:23; Jn. 14:6), so here we learn that no one can make claims upon Jesus unless they come to Him by way of the Father's will! **The will of my Father** is no matter of small importance to Jesus, because He sums up the whole point and direction of the life of a true disciple by picturing him as **he who does the will of my Father.** Some extra-sensitive and perhaps less-informed disciples nervously wonder how they can tell what God's will for their life should be, and unfortunately, they overlook grand passages of Scripture that spell out exactly what the Father wills for them every day! (Cf. Mt. 7:21; 18:14; 9:13; Jn. 6:28, 29, 39, 40; 7:17; Eph. 5:17; 6:6; 1 Th. 4:3; 5:18; 1 Tim. 2:4; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:9) Here again is written your name and mine: **whosoever!** The grand lessons that pour out of this declaration of our Lord are many, not the least of which are these:

1. **WE TOO ARE KIN TO JESUS!** Even though we did not get to walk with Him in Galilee, though we never saw a miracle, never felt His healing touch, still the humblest Christian among us today stands side by side with Nazarene and can call Him "Brother!" The kindest Christian mother today is as dear to Jesus as the "Holy Virgin." The most obedient little boy or girl, who for Jesus' sake, does what their daddy or mommy says, is Jesus' little brother or sister! Would to God we could get that paganism out of our hearts that longs to "walk where Jesus walked," but refuses to do what God says where we DO walk! That kind of longing to have been one of Jesus' immediate family, which cannot seek to please the heavenly Father in the simplest, ordinary acts of common courtesy and helpfulness in our own family, can claim no relationship to Jesus of Nazareth! In these simple words, Jesus throws open the front door of His house to us who live in this land in this century, that we might enjoy all the joyous privileges of His home! Although in one, true sense we are the willing servants of God, yet in another sense we are not servants in God's house, but **SONS**, and that makes Jesus

our Brother! (Study Gal. 3:23—4:7; Heb. 2:10-13) We are His poor relation, but this does not make Him ashamed. (Heb. 2:11) Best of all, He plans to own us as His own before the entire spiritual universe assembled before the Father! (Mt. 10:32)

2. To Jesus, this relationship is supreme and becomes, at the same time, the standard by which all men will be judged. So the test of connection with Jesus is not church membership, family ties, or other accidental or unreal tests that do not really describe our real standing, but whether we do God's will or not! How many will be lost, because they permitted their loving, concerned, well-meaning family to come between them and Christ! (Cf. Mt. 8:21, 22; 10:37; Lk. 9:59-62) What an example in the personal experience of our Lord Himself! When it comes to doing the will of God first above all, whether it be the Messiah Himself or one of His lowliest servants, no human ties or claims may be allowed to interfere or dictate our course. Even the Lord of glory has walked this lonely, difficult path and dealt with these thorny problems. He faced this crisis in His own life and gave us a brilliant example of dealing gently but firmly with a delicate, trying situation where those nearest and dearest would take us farthest from the Father's will.
3. "**Whosoever**" is Jesus' disciple is in the family of God, whether he is a member of our group or not, whether he is of our race, nation or social class, whether we like him or not. How this gospel of the true family of God rebukes every sort of sectarian attitude and breaks down prejudicial barriers!
4. Chrysostom, quoted by Lange (*Matthew*, 232) is remembered as saying:

How many women have blessed that holy virgin and her womb and have desired to be such a mother as she was! What hinders them? Christ has made for us a wide way to this happiness: and not only women, but men may tread it: the way of *obedience*, this is it which makes such a mother—not the throes of parturition.

5. And even as we find spiritual kinship to Jesus founded upon our common interest and our common commitment to do the will of the Father, we will also discover the fundamental

- secret underlying Jesus' promise that those who follow Him will gain in this life many more fathers, mothers and other dear ones than they ever gave up. (Cf. Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29, 30; Lk. 18:29, 30) These are the people who really understand us and share our commitment to the Lord, for they too are really Jesus' folk and we really do have so much more in common with them than with our own unbelieving, ungodly kin. Furthermore, this is the reason why the "family of God" is no mere figure of speech or academic question buried under dusty doctrines. God's family is a REAL family.
6. Another lesson in this text is the warning against the subtle danger of allowing ourselves as Christian workers to be distracted from our rightful duty by those dear friends and kinfolk who would cause us to place self-interest or self-preservation or our family ties first. We are easily self-warned and reasonably braced to face the taunts of our enemies, but the perilous persuasiveness of those who love us represents a far greater threat to our best good than any enemy. Jesus led the way by putting family claims upon His time and life into their proper perspective.
 7. When we remember the anxiety of Jesus' relatives for His health and safety when He was burning Himself out campaigning for the Kingdom of God, and given His inflexible adherence to what was clear to Him as the will of God, we see that it is too frequent a temptation to presume, with Jesus' brethren, that the Kingdom of God may be promoted and protected by the practice of prudential policy born of experience in this selfish world and learned from it.

CONCLUSION

Matthew's orderly method of organizing his materials, which places this event at the logical conclusion of a major section, is quite revealing. Even as he concluded his eleventh chapter with Jesus' thanksgiving for humble, honest hearts who trusted Him, in which He pointed out that, while God's revelations are for all, only disciples will understand them, since intellectual gifts are not the determining factor, so also here Matthew concludes this section with Jesus' declaration that, while the Kingdom of God is open to all, only real disciples need apply. The credentials of discipleship are validated, not by one's family ties, but by his obedience. Despite the evidences of a growing negative response to Jesus and despite His growing necessity

12:50

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to deal vigorously with slander and opposition appearing in every form, Matthew triumphantly concludes these sections on opposition to the Master by including this brief piece that fairly shouts the happy news: "No matter how black seem Jesus' hopes of reaching **this evil generation**, nevertheless, He has won a few good hearts in those disciples who do the Father's will!" In addition, Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 22) is probably right to see this section as Jesus' invitation, once again offered to "enter into kinship with Him through obedience to the will of God . . . to abandon our own prejudices and self-will and to accept Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. If we refuse, we drift farther and farther away from God; if we accept, we enter into the very family and heart of God."

THE DEITY AND GREATNESS OF CHRIST IN MATTHEW 12

12:6 Jesus claimed to be greater than the Temple of God.

12:8 He claimed Lordship over the Sabbath!

12:28 He proved that His works, done by the Spirit's power, were clear evidence that God's Kingdom had just arrived.

12:40 Jesus claimed to know not only to what end His ministry would come, i.e. His death on the cross, but also its glorious outcome, i.e. the resurrection after burial.

12:41 Jesus claimed to be greater than Jonah the inspired prophet whose labors produced the most amazing repentance in his hearers.

12:42 Jesus claimed to be wiser than Solomon whose wisdom had never been surpassed by any man.

12:50 To do God's will is to become a kinsman of Jesus. "My Father" is a claim to uniqueness. (cf. Jn. 5:17, 18)

This staggering series of claims contains no apology for their being made nor even an explanation of their meaning. They are offered to be understood by their original hearers at face value. Jesus expected them to take Him literally. But, if we are sure of His sanity, we cannot take Him literally without either crucifying Him as a bold imposter or bowing our knees before Him to confess Him Lord of our life! And this is the very conclusion to which Matthew in his presentation of the Gospel would lead us: to decide!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. During what general period of Jesus' ministry is this particular

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incident to be dated?

2. What was the general character of Jesus' life and work at this time, that provides particular poignancy to this incident?
3. List other incidents in Jesus' life and ministry in which the mother or brothers of Jesus showed particular misunderstanding or lack of true appreciation of His great purpose for having come into the world.
4. Discuss the meaning of Jesus' answer given in reply to His kinsfolks' request that He stop what He was doing to step outside to talk with them.
5. Name Jesus' brothers.
6. Discuss the three fundamental views offered as to their actual relationship to Jesus. Which of these three views do you accept? State the reasons for accepting this one and rejecting the other two.
7. According to Jesus, who are really members of His own true family? On what basis does He establish this kinship?

DO YOU HAVE IT IN YOUR HEART?

Matthew 11, 12

Do you know who said each of the following statements? What or who prompted them to say it? What did they mean by it? What, if any, are the textual problems or translational variations? How would you apply the truth contained in their words to your life practise?

1. "Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding . . ."
2. "Wisdom is justified by her works."
3. "And if ye are willing to receive it, this is the Elijah, that is to come."
4. ". . . he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."
5. "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee."
6. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."
7. "Art thou he that cometh, . . ."
8. "A gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"
9. "For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath."
10. "And in his name shall the Gentiles hope."

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11. "Can this be the son of David?"
12. ". . . neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *Him*."
13. "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."
14. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; . . ."
15. ". . . but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him . . ."
16. ". . . and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first."
17. "Behold, my mother and my brethren!"
18. "He that is not with me is against me . . ."
19. "A bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench till he send forth judgment unto victory."

JESUS' WITNESS TO OLD TESTAMENT INSPIRATION

By John Ransom

Is the Old Testament inspired of God? Is it scientifically and historically accurate? Is it consistent with itself, not contradicting itself in various places? These things, and more, will in this paper constitute inspiration. That is, the Old Testament Scripture is "God-breathed" in the original copy and was fully inspired and without error or contradiction.

Many faithful believers have serious doubts about the Old Testament, even some who have a firm faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, in this study we will approach such a group, assuming here the deity of Jesus Christ, that He is God's Son. We will turn to Him who is God in the flesh for an evaluation of Old Testament Scripture. While we value the studies of men in higher and lower criticism and external and internal evidence, we will, as Christians, look at these Jewish Scriptures through the eyes of Him who is our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

As Harry Rimmer reminds us (*Internal Evidence of Inspiration*, 149):

For if the Lord Jesus Christ is in truth and fact the Son of God as He claims to be, He is then the highest authority on any subject of which He speaks. . . , He could and does speak from the standpoint of omniscience . . . He can speak from the source of divine wisdom, knowing that even the future cannot alter His teachings. . . . So when we study the testimony of the Saviour concerning the nature and source

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of the text of the Bible, we are consulting the final and absolute witness. His statements should settle the question once and for all.

It seems wise at this point to plunge immediately into Jesus' use and opinion of the Old Testament, these being proofs of its inspiration. We notice:

I. HIS WHOLE LIFE'S COMPLETE SATURATION WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The things He says are frequently couched in the language of the Old Testament. H. S. Miller (*General Biblical Introduction*, 53) lists a great many of these: "The abomination of desolation" (Mt. 24:15 = Daniel 12:11); "Great tribulation such as hath not been since the beginning" (Mt. 24:21 = Daniel 12:1); "The blood of the covenant" (Mark 14:24 = Exodus 24:8); "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful" (Mt. 26:38 = Ps. 42:6, 12; 43:5); "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48 = Isaiah 66:24); "Blessed is he that cometh" (Mt. 23:39 = Psalms 118:26); "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46 = Psalms 31:5); "Say to the mountains" (Luke 23:30 = Hosea 10:8); and many more. Jesus' whole life was bound up in Old Testament references. He began His earthly ministry with "It is written" (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10) and ended it in the same manner. (Luke 24:46)

II. HIS ACCEPTANCE AND FULFILMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO HIMSELF.

On one occasion Jesus said in reference to the Old Testament, "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; *and these are they that bear witness of me.*" (John 5:39) Then, almost immediately, He went ahead to say in vv. 46, 47: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writing, how shall ye believe my words?" Again He acknowledges and accepts the prophetic voice of the whole Old Testament in this sweeping statement, "These are my words which I spoke unto you, while I was with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, concerning me." (Luke 24:44) No statement could be more clear than this as to His absolute assurance of Scripture, nor could any opportunity be more suitable to express doubt, had there been any.

The Gospel writers have faithfully recorded for us event after event in Jesus' life that fulfilled Scripture. This begins with His

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birth (Mt. 1:22, 23) and continues throughout His life (Mt. 2:5, 6, 15, 17, 18, 23; 4:13-17; 8:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:31, 54, 56; 27:9, 10, 46) up to the very time of the crucifixion (John 19:24, 28, 35-37). This demonstrates clearly how "His whole life was a fulfilment of Scripture." (Miller, *op cit.*, 54. However, see the special study "*How Does Matthew Use the Prophecies?*" Vol. I, p. 81ff., HEF)

An example of His own application of prophecy to Himself may be found in Mt. 21:42 where He foretells His own rejection as recorded in Psalms 118:22, 23. Rimmer (*op cit.*, 176-178) notes that "He had no doubt in His own mind about the certainty of the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Himself, and history certainly vindicated His reliance upon the infallibility of the written word." In John 13:18 He quotes Psalm 41:9 of His betrayal by Judas. In Luke 22:37 He quotes from Isaiah 53:12, referring these words to His own death. In Mt. 12:40, 41 He takes the account of Jonah and makes it a figure of His own death and resurrection.

Notice also His acceptance of prophecies other than those concerning Himself. Rimmer (p. 165) comments:

In Matt. 15 (7-9) He definitely declared that Isaiah spoke of and to the people of Christ's time. That is to say, Isaiah had anticipated by seven centuries the social and religious conditions of the nation of Israel and described them in terms that were historically fulfilled. Since men cannot foretell the future, and since prophecy is the sphere of omniscience, His conclusion is that Isaiah was borne along by the spirit of God in such passages.

(While Rimmer's conclusion is fundamentally correct, his choice of Matt. 15:7-9 as a specific case in point is unfortunate or, at best, inconclusive. See the comments on that passage, HEF)

Who would dare say, after examination of Christ's knowledge, use and application of prophecy, that He did not have explicit faith in these Holy Scriptures?

III. HIS STRESS ON OTHERS' KNOWING AND FOLLOWING THE OLD TESTAMENT.

If one would very highly recommend to you a doctor, lawyer, book or certain action, you could conclude that that person were either trying to deceive you, or else that he had strong faith in what he recommended. Such is true of Jesus, and we are convinced that He was not a deceiver! In His omniscience, Jesus plainly trusted the Scriptures and strongly recommended them to His listeners. In the

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Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17-20) Jesus shows the extreme importance He attaches not only to a knowledge of the Word, but also to the practice of teaching it to others. In fact, those who follow and teach the Scriptures "shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven," while those who disobey and teach others to disobey "shall be called least."

On four occasions, as Miller (*op cit.*, 53) notes, "He expressed surprise that the Jews had so carelessly read their God-given Scriptures. (Matt. 19:4, 5; 21:16, 42; 22:31, 32; Mark 12:26; from Genesis 1:27; 2:24; 5:2; Psalm 8:2; 118:22, 23; Exodus 3:6)" What a biting rebuke it must also have been to the Pharisees, who prided themselves on their exact knowledge of the Word, when He said to them in response to their ignorance on some point, "Have ye not read the Scriptures?" (Mark 12:10; Matt. 21:16, 42)

His real attitude toward the Old Testament Scripture and particularly its relation to man's behaviour is revealed when He says, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22:29). In this He alludes to the fact that a basis for error in spiritual matters is ignorance of Scripture. Also implied in this is the implicit conclusion that the Scriptures themselves do not err.

Yes, this was the guide to which Jesus continually pointed His listeners. Would our Lord purposely lead them to a faulty, erring production when He Himself had the Word of Life? *I believe not!*

IV. HIS COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE OF ITS HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS.

Many critics have at least denied the historical records of the Old Testament, but Jesus' view of the inspiration of the Old Testament was, as we stated at the outset, an assumption of the full, or plenary, inspiration of that document and this included its historical accounts.

This is demonstrated when He, many times almost casually, and yet with utmost assurance, referred to these events. Notice Matt. 12:42 where Jesus tells of the visit to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba. When He does this, the whole weight of His authority is cast behind the authenticity of I Kings 10 and II Chronicles 9. Almost in passing (Luke 4:25-27), He confirms the accounts of the widow of Zarephath to whom Elisha was sent and the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian leper. In these last two illustrations, as Rimmer points out (*op cit.*, 169-172), Jesus upheld with His authority some of the greatest (and most often criticized) miracles of the Old Testament.

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This is so likewise in John 3:14 where He compares Himself to the bronze serpent which Moses lifted up. Again Rimmer notes that:

Here He approves another Old Testament miraculous event without the slightest intimation that it is unhistorical and untrue. In fact, He found nothing incredible in the fact that God could do such marvels.

Our Lord also established some of His most basic teaching on the truthfulness of these Old Testament accounts. In John 6:32, 49 He makes certain reference to the feeding of the children of Israel in the wilderness. "Upon the credibility of this section of the Old Testament text, Jesus Christ bases His entire ministry and offers salvation to men."—Rimmer (172). (However, Rimmer overstates his case here. Perhaps he should have affirmed that the Lord based His *argument* about His ministry upon universally believed facts of the OT passage, not the ministry itself upon the credibility. HEF) Recorded in Mark 12:26 are Jesus' remarks concerning Moses and the burning bush. Jesus used this historical event to propel His teaching on immortality to the unbelieving Sadducees, and, ultimately, to the whole world. In Matt. 12:3, during an argument with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath, Jesus cites the episode of David, recorded in I Samuel 21:6. Rimmer notes (173): "Upon the historicity of this event He bases His reasoning concerning the superiority of man over the day of rest." Still another example of this type of unshakable confidence in the historical accounts of the Old Testament is found in Matt. 19:4-9. Here Jesus gives His teaching concerning the sanctity of marriage, referring to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, thereby accepting and confirming in one sweeping statement the creation by God, the origin of marriage and the existence, words and work of Moses."

To obtain a broad view of what Jesus thought of the historical accounts in Jewish Scripture, we might think of it in the following way: Jesus believed in Noah and the flood (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26, 27); in the accounts of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15); and in Lot and his wife fleeing from the city of Sodom (Luke 17:28-32); in the call of Moses at the bush (Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37); and that David really ate the shewbread (Matt. 12:3-5; cf. I Samuel 21). Our Lord believed that God created man and established marriage (Matt. 19:4-6), that Solomon reigned as a glorious, majestic King (Matt. 6:29) and that the Queen of Sheba came to visit him (Matt. 12:42). He is certain of the great miracle wrought for the Gentile widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:10-16) and the healing of Naaman

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the leper (Luke 4:25-27) as well as the lifting up of the bronze serpent in the wilderness by Moses that the people might be healed (John 3:14). Jesus showed no doubt whatsoever that Israel actually wandered in the wilderness and was miraculously fed *mana* from heaven (John 6:32, 49). He showed no doubt that righteous Abel and Zachariah were really slain as recorded (Luke 11:51; Matt. 23:35); or that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were real persons (Matt. 22:31, 32). He believed that Moses lived and spoke (Mark 7:10; 12:19, 26); that David was a divinely inspired writer (Mark 12:36; Luke 20:41-44); that Daniel was a prophet (Matt. 24:15); and that Jonah actually spent three days and nights in the fish's belly (Matt. 12:39, 40; 16:4).

When my Lord held such a view of the historical accounts of the Old Testament, how can I doubt or how can I have any less confidence in them than He? Surely His testimony must be of prime importance to me!

V. HIS APPEAL TO IT IN EVERY SITUATION.

Jesus' own words were of great power and authority, and He Himself recognized this. In Mark 13:31 He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," and again in John 6:63, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Furthermore, He affirmed that these words were not His but the words of the Father who sent Him. Yet was it to His own word that He turned in every situation? No! Whether Jesus is attacked or questioned on the subject of the Sabbath or vows, marriage or the resurrection, His answer is usually Scripture, and an abundance of it. The Old Testament Scripture is the authority in all of these controversial matters. He pierces right through their ancient traditions and distorted opinions with His accurate and to-the-point references. So teaches Pierre Ch. Marcel (*Revelation and the Bible*, 122-124) To this Broomall (*Biblical Criticism*, 36) adds:

Christ held the Old Testament as a final authority dealing with matters of faith and conduct. He appealed to it frequently with His characteristic "It is written . . ." as if to say, "God has spoken in His Word and that settles it!" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). He even cited examples out of the Old Testament as authoritative for His own conduct (Mark 2:25ff.). Its statements about legal matters were considered authoritative (John 8:17), and its predictions concerning Him were looked upon as true and of supreme authority in deciding His messianic claims (Luke 24:25-27, 44ff., John 5:45ff.). The voices

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of Moses and the prophets were considered as authoritative in matters of the soul's destiny (Luke 16:29-31). Christ believed that if a principle of truth were taught in the Old Testament, there was no need to appeal to a higher authority.

VI. HIS OBVIOUS STATEMENTS AS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT BEING FROM GOD, HENCE, GOD'S WORD.

This is one of Jesus' most important assertions of Old Testament inspiration. Here He plainly reveals God as the source of the Word and also indicates the nature of that inspiration: "Not *one jot or tittle* shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled." Broomall (*op cit.*, 35, 36) comments:

In Matt. 4:4 Christ cites Deuteronomy 8:3 ("Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God") in His reply to Satan's temptations. Here Christ gives His approval to the belief that the Old Testament comes "out of the mouth of God." (cf. Hebrews 1:1 . . . In citing Psalm 110:1 Christ affirms that David spoke that verse "in the Spirit" (Matt. 22:43; cf. II Samuel 23:2; Rev. 1:10).

Rimmer (*op cit.*, 164) reminds us that:

In Mark 7:8-13 there is a typical instance containing a direct statement of Jesus as to the authority of the Scriptures. In condemning the Pharisees on the ground that they had left the commandment of God and retained the traditions of man, He said to them, "Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions." Thereupon He quoted the words of Moses as they are found in Exodus 20 and 21; Deut. 5 and Leviticus 20. At the conclusion, He says that by their conduct they *make void the word of God by their traditions*. It does not take an analytical mind to notice that when Jesus quotes words by the pen of Moses, He stated that these are the words of God and should be obeyed.

Carl F. H. Henry ("Inspiration", *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 278) notes that

In John 10:34ff., Jesus singles out an obscure passage in the Psalms ("Ye are gods," Psalm 82:6) to reinforce the point that the Scriptures cannot be broken."

He then very clearly labels this as *the word of God* delivered to men.

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Warfield ("Inspiration," *ISBE*, 1476, 1477) joins the following illustration:

The confidence with which Jesus rested on Scripture, in its every declaration, is further illustrated in a passage like Matt. 19:4. Certain Pharisees had come to Him with a question on divorce and He met them thus: "Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh . . . What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." "*He who made them . . . said.*" "What therefore *God* hath joined together." Yet this passage does not give us a saying of God recorded in Scripture, but just the words of Scripture itself, and can be treated as a declaration of God's only on the hypothesis that all scripture is a declaration of God's.

All of this seems to sum up Christ's positive and unequivocal stand on the inspiration of the Old Testament. Nothing could be clearer and more to the point than these many references (and many besides) that plainly attribute the Old Testament to God Himself and to His Spirit. As men and women believing in the Christ, we too will view the Old Testament as being delivered unto men by the mouth of God through faithful witnesses.

Perhaps the one basic question still in the mind of the honest inquirer for truth is: "Did Jesus' endorsement of the Old Testament include *all* the Old Testament, or only certain portions of it?" This brings us to Jesus' seventh proof of Old Testament inspiration:

VII. HIS ENDORSEMENT OF THE COMPLETE OLD TESTAMENT.

H. S. Miller (*op cit.*, 38, 44) informs us that the Jews divided the canon of the Old Testament into three main sections: the law, prophets and writings (or Psalms). Jesus quoted from and made definite reference to each of these by name. Miller continues:

"All this" (the events thus far in this chapter) "was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:49). Hence, *the prophets* are Scripture and must be fulfilled. Jesus expounded "in all the Scriptures, *beginning at Moses and all the prophets*, the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Hence the . . . first two sections are Scripture and the theme is Jesus. (Next) the heart

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of the travelers burned within them as He opened to them the Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 32)

Then a little later as Jesus appeared to them He said, "These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the *law of Moses* and in *the prophets*, and in *the Psalms* concerning me." (Luke 24:44) Here in this sweeping statement Jesus includes all of the Old Testament, each of the three sections are clearly named as if this were exactly His intent, i.e. to point out the unity and authority of the complete Old Testament both to His first century disciples and to us.

In addition to this, Miller (*op cit.*, 52) notes that "He covered and endorsed the entire Old Testament in one statement, "from the blood of righteous Abel (Gen. 4:1-10) unto the blood of Zachariah' (II Chron. 24:20, 21), or from Genesis to Chronicles, just as we would say 'from Genesis to Malachi' (Matt. 23:35)"

Jesus' whole view of the inspiration of the Old Testament was strongly opposed to the idea that only parts of the Bible are infallible and trustworthy. Edward Young (*Thy Word is Truth*, 48) argues that:

It is not only in specific teaching or in great doctrines that the Scriptures cannot be broken. Rather, in all parts, in its very entirety, the Bible, if we are to accept its witness to itself, is utterly infallible. It is not only that each book given the name of Scripture is infallible, but, more than that, the content of each such book is itself Scripture, the Word of God written and, hence, infallible, free entirely from the errors which adhere to mere human compositions. Not alone to moral and ethical truths, but to all statements of fact this inspiration extends. That inspiration which the Bible claims for itself is one that is full; it is plenary inspiration. As our Lord said, in giving expression to their very doctrine, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matt. 5:17, 18).

To this Rimmer (*op cit.*, 168) adds: "The statement that the fulfillment of the Old Testament was more certain than the continuance of the physical creation, lifts those writings so high above human literary productions that they can be considered only as supernatural in their origin."

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As we examine the Old and New Testaments and additional historical evidence, it may be seen that the majority of the people in Jesus' day accepted the Old Testament Scriptures that we now have as in a real and true sense "God-breathed." Jesus and His followers were certainly no exception to this. James Orr (*Revelation and Inspiration*, 182) observes that while "modern writers may question whether the view of Jesus and His apostles was a correct one, . . . they will not question that the view was there." This leads us to Rimmer's statement of the conclusion (*op cit.*, 179): "The only alternative to the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God is to discredit the person of Christ and discount His testimony." And, quoting Westcott, Miller (*op cit.*, 54) says,

We must either accept the doctrine of plenary inspiration . . . or deny the veracity of the evangelists. If our Lord's words are accurately recorded, or even if their general tenor is expressed in one of the gospels, the Bible is indeed the *Word of God* in the fullest spiritual sense . . .

It also seems well to note, in the midst of all His positive statements of acceptance (of the Old Testament), Broomall (*op cit.*, 36) notes the negative fact that Christ nowhere insinuates that the Old Testament is erroneous in any detail. . . . There is not the slightest suggestion that it is in need of correction. Even His famous 'but I say unto you' as found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:22, etc.) is not to be interpreted as a correction of the former revelation, but is to be understood as a correction of Jewish misunderstanding of the Old Testament teaching." (While not quarrelling with Broomall's basic conclusion, we may construe Jesus' statements of authority in another fashion, i.e., rather than the mere correction of Jewish misunderstanding and rather than a simple correction of former revelation, He stands fully in agreement that the former revelation came from God but upon His own authority raises the standard to perfection itself. See my notes on Mt. 5:20, "Jesus' Purpose," Vol. I, 255ff. HEF)

Yes, Jesus affirmed that, although heaven and earth would pass away, His words would endure (Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Yet to what did He turn in His hour of dire temptation? the Old Testament. Or in teaching? Or correction? To the Old Testament. When His own word was everlasting, would our Lord turn to anything lacking these same great God-given powers? I think not!

Rimmer (*op cit.*, 178) reminds us that:

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Whether Christ used (the Old Testament) for illustration, argument, in warning, or as prophecy fulfilled in Himself, He handled the ancient record with a holy reverence in the belief that it was the Word of God.

May we gain and foster such a use and reverence for the Word ourselves.

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