

THE GOSPEL
OF
MATTHEW

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***THE GOSPEL
OF
MATTHEW***

Volume I

by

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PREFACE

It is predictably a constant feature of commentaries that they do not explain everything one might wish to know. This BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK on the Gospel of Matthew is no exception. As problems and questions have arisen in preparing this study, the author would search through other books for help—often in vain. Therefore, if some of the problems one might imagine are not dealt with in this brief study, the reason is that the present author perhaps did not see the problems, or having seen them, saluted them from afar and admitted he was a disciple with much more to learn, or else, having tried to deal with them, failed. As study continued, more material was constantly being uncovered that would have helped clarify the meaning of a passage already touched upon. But in the press of life and ministry it has not always been possible to return to those passages to rewrite.

Grateful acknowledgement is hereby given to Seth Wilson, a student of the life of Jesus, whose helpful teaching has encouraged this study. Notes and attitudes reflected herein are sometimes his and are gratefully passed on to bless other lives. Other sources of information will be documented with just a word in the text; the full reference may be found in the bibliography.

Studying at the feet of the Apostle Matthew has blessed my ministry and personal life manifold. Trying to plumb the depths of his meaning has convinced me that there is yet more down there to enrich the life for as long as one chooses to meditate upon Matthew's independent testimony to the Lord's message contained therein. Therefore, relatively speaking, this first volume of MATTHEW is a putting together of some notes to stimulate the reader to begin his own life-long appreciation of the mind of the Master revealed in the words of His publican-Apostle.

The aim of this study is to state in popular language the timeless testimony of Matthew, to indicate some appropriate applications of each truth and to suggest correlations with other commands and explanations made by the Apostles elsewhere in the NT. The THOUGHT QUESTIONS are intended to engage the mind in a lively discussion which should evoke vivid curiosity and opinions about what Jesus actually said or what Matthew actually meant. The FACT QUESTIONS attempt to review the knowledge of the materials from which buildings of understanding are constructed. The PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY is the author's attempt to harmonize all of the available information given in the four Gospels into one coordinated

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story or discourse so as to reveal connections not seen in the reading of a single Gospel alone. Often a word, phrase or incident recorded by another Evangelist throws light on something that Matthew records without comment or explanation. All words printed in *italics* type in the TEXT are words added by the American Revision Committee to the American Standard Version in order to render a smoother translation, although these words are not in the original Greek. All words printed in **bold-face** type in the NOTES are citations of words or phrases in the ASV text upon which comment is being made.

My prayer is that the God of all truth will forgive what is mistaken or misleading about what is said about His Word herein, bless what is true and graciously accept what I offer to Him as my service over the past years of study and putting together these notes. Further, it is my prayer that these notes will do something to help us better to understand the will of Jesus and move us to enthrone Him more fully as King of our lives.

INTRODUCTION

TO WHOM DID MATTHEW DIRECT HIS BOOK?

The observation has often been urged that this gospel is addressed particularly to the Jews. Its Jewish destination appears, for instance, in the emphasis given to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the events of Jesus' life. This, of course, could be overemphasized since all of the other three gospels record fulfillments of the ancient prophecies. Further, this record of Matthew is not Jewish in the sense that its message contradicts the mission of the Church to the Gentile world. If the gospel of Matthew could be said to be answering Jewish attacks upon the Christian message, then it should also be observed that Matthew does not disturb his narration with obtrusive answers to the supposed Jewish attacks. The differences between Matthew's record and that of Mark, Luke and John are not all as clean-cut in this area of deciding to what audience the writer aimed his material, as would be supposed. There are subtle differences of treatment and emphasis, to be sure; a certain special Jewish flavor cannot be denied. But to dogmatize that Matthew did not intend his message for Gentile minds as well as Jewish is to ignore several definite matthaean emphases upon the Gentiles' interest in Jesus, His interest in them and their need of conversion.

The evidences which point to the Jewish reading public as the aim of Matthew's message, are the following considerations:

1. The genealogy of Jesus is traced back only to David and Abraham whereas Luke traces his genealogical table clear back to Adam.
2. The matthaean account of the Sermon on the Mount reveals the true meaning of righteousness as contrasted with the ideals of the Law and demonstrates the true blessing of citizenship in the Kingdom of God but only hints at the gospel of grace. Its aim is to contrast the superficial views of current Pharisaism with the ultimate goal of driving man to the necessities of faith and salvation by grace. The non-Jewish reader could certainly arrive at the same point by reading the Sermon but probably with less understanding than would one trained in Old Testament religion and hopes for a glorious messianic kingdom.
3. The fulfillments of some 40 Old Testament passages in the life of Jesus is a matter for which a gentile reader would

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have perhaps some appreciation, if he knew something of the prophetic literature, whereas it would strike instantly to the heart of Jewish messianic interest and hopes. This must not be pushed too far inasmuch as, even today, the gentile mind can be impressed by the concurrence of hundreds of detailed prophecies in the life and ministry of one man. Matthew gives ample evidence that Jesus is the kind of Messiah actually predicted by the prophets and not the Messiah of popular expectation and mistaken rabbinic concept.

Matthew's history of Jesus, while written from the Jewish standpoint for readers trained in the Old Testament religion, is primarily history. It would be unnecessary to call the Gospel by Matthew a defence, and Matthew's purpose chiefly apologetic, except as any historical and objective presentation carries with it its own convincing force. Matthew does not direct his message to the Jewish nation in the sense of upholding current national ideals, or by exalting Jesus as a Jewish political hero capable of fulfilling their materialistic messianic expectations. Rather, he draws Israel's true picture painted in the dark colors of national unbelief that rejected its Messiah. From the adoration of the Magi to the all-inclusive commission given by Jesus to evangelize the entire world, Matthew pictures Jesus as Him in whom the Gentiles may hope. He presents Jesus as Him to whom all unconverted Jews must turn in true repentance.

WHAT IS MATTHEW'S ORDER OR PLAN OF PRESENTATION?

His plan must be deduced from what he actually wrote rather than from any explicit statement that declares whether he intended to follow a strict chronological order or a more generally topical one, since he left no such statement. It seems clear, however, that while arranging his materials, Matthew chose not to be guided by chronological considerations so much as by the desire to present larger sections of Jesus' teaching. To this supposed end he seems to have collected into one place the teachings on a specific subject which may or may not have all been presented on one given occasion, although all were probably set forth by Jesus during a given period of His ministry. Though Matthew does not declare this intent, it may be deduced by checking the following list of topical examples of Jesus' preaching, for material that Mark and Luke sometimes describe as having been given on other occasions.

INTRODUCTION

1. Sermon on the Mount	chs. 5, 6, 7
2. Sermon on Evangelism	ch. 10
3. Sermon on John the Baptist	11:1-19
4. Sermon on Unforgiveable Sin	12:22-45
5. Sermon in Parables	ch. 13
6. Sermon on Human Traditions	15:1-20
7. Sermon on Stumbling-blocks and Forgiveness	ch. 18
8. Sermon on Eleventh-hour Laborers	20:1-16
9. Three Parables on Rejected Opportunity	21:28—22:14
10. Four Answers to Attackers	22:15-46
11. Sermon Against Religious Leaders	ch. 23
12. Sermon on End of the Jewish State and of the World	ch. 24
13. Sermon on Personal Preparation	ch. 25

Considering the live probability that the Evangelists summarize Jesus' teaching to provide their readers with the maximum information in the minimum space without losing the heart and power of His message, it should not be surprising to find the same nuggets, that Matthew places at one point, placed on another occasion by Mark or Luke. It is quite probable that Jesus did repeatedly address the same lessons, parables and sermons in equivalent language to men of various localities who had the same sins, identical prejudices and copybook concepts of righteousness and the Kingdom of God. Further, similar events may be confounded by the modern reader, whereas they were actually separate, however closely they might resemble each other.

The plan to be followed in this MATTHEW Study Textbook will be that which follows the order of materials as Matthew himself arranged them. It is not a small temptation to rearrange his material along chronological lines seen most often in Luke's Gospel. Such a rearrangement, with a view to harmonizing the four Gospels, is of great value for showing the coincidence of independent testimony. In addition it would capture more exactly the succession of events as well as provide to the student a sense of progressive continuity from the beginning of Jesus' preaching as it moves toward His glorification. For instance, it may be confusing to some to learn that, chronologically speaking, Matthew's chapters 8, 9, 10, 12 all contain events which probably precede the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in chapters 5, 6, 7. However, if it will be remembered that Matthew does not either claim or strive for exact chronological order, then the seemingly contradictory placement of certain events and doctrines will cause no consternation.

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For all the advantages to be gained by shifting Matthew's material and reorganizing it according to clearer chronological sequences of Luke, yet there is no little merit in letting Matthew tell his own story. As Apostle of Jesus Christ and inspired by His Holy Spirit, Matthew should be allowed to arrange the Gospel as he deems best. He intended that his systematic collection of the various discourses and events carry to the reader with its own convincing force the sure conviction that "this Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and raised from the dead, is God's Messianic King." Let those who would criticize Matthew's "anachronisms and lack of ordinary historical judgment" realise that, after all, Matthew is writing the book and he should be permitted the ordinary literary liberties to group some details according to their nature and import. Matthew is master of his own work: let us hear him tell us about the Lord.

Therefore, in dealing with a specific passage in Matthew which has close verbal parallels that were also spoken on other occasions, primary attention will be given to get at Jesus' meaning, rather than to decide upon what occasion He said it. Wherever possible to harmonize parallel passages of Mark, Luke or John with the text of Matthew, the PARAPHRASE-HARMONY presents one version of an event, interweaving the various information derived from the parallels. Since other statements made by other eyewitnesses tend to modify, clarify or extend the declarations of the one eyewitness, it is a very desirable goal to have all available testimony in hand before proceeding to interpret any part of it.

SECTIONAL OUTLINE OF MATTHEW

1. Genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17)
2. Annunciation to Joseph (1:18-25)
3. Visit of the Wisemen (2:1-12)
4. Flight into Egypt and Return (2:13-23)
5. Preaching of John the Baptist (3:1-12)
6. Jesus Is Baptized by John (3:13-17)
7. Jesus Is Tempted by the Devil (4:1-11)
8. Jesus Preaches in Galilee (4:12-17)
9. Jesus Calls Four Fishermen (4:18-22)
10. Jesus Preaches and Heals in Galilee (4:23-25)
11. Jesus Preaches the Sermon on the Mount (5:1—8:1)
12. Jesus Heals a Leper (8:1-4)
13. Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (8:5-13)

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14.	Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law	(8:14-17)
15.	Jesus Calls Others to Discipleship	(8:18-22)
16.	Jesus Stills a Tempest	(8:23-27)
17.	Jesus Frees the Gadarene Demoniacs	(8:28—9:1)
18.	Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic	(9:2-8)
19.	Jesus Calls Matthew Levi	(9:9-17)
20.	Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter	(9:18-26)
21.	Jesus Heals Two Blind Men	(9:27-34)
22.	Jesus Evangelizes Galilee	(9:35-38)
23.	Jesus Commissions the Twelve Apostles to Evangelize (10:1—11:1)	
24.	Jesus Questioned by John, Sermon on John	(11:2-19)
25.	Jesus Condemns Unbelieving Cities and Invites "Babes" to Come to Him	(11:20-30)
26.	Jesus Answers Charges of Sabbath Breaking	(12:1-14)
27.	Jesus Heals Many	(12:15-21)
28.	Jesus Is Attacked for Casting Out Demon and Charged with Being in League with Satan	(12:22-37)
29.	Jesus Gives the Sign of Jonah	(12:38-45)
30.	Jesus Refuses to Let Fleshly Ties Bind Him	(12:46-50)
31.	Jesus Preaches Great Sermon in Parables	(13:1-53)
32.	Jesus Is Refused by His Own at Nazareth	(13:54-58)
33.	Jesus Hears of the Foul Murder of John the Baptist	(14:1-13a)
34.	Jesus Feeds the 5000 and Walks on the Sea	(14:13b-33)
35.	Jesus Heals Some Sick at Gennesaret	(14:34-36)
36.	Jesus Argues with Jerusalem Pharisees about the Traditions	(15:1-20)
37.	Jesus Heals the Syrophenician Woman's Daughter	(15:21-28)
38.	Jesus Feeds 4000 and Heals Many in Decapolis	(15:29-39a)
39.	Jesus Refuses to Give Additional Signs from Heaven	(15:39b—16:4)
40.	Jesus Warns Disciples Against Influence of Popular Leaders and Parties	(16:5-12)
41.	Jesus Tests Apostles: Peter's Confession	(16:13-28)
42.	Jesus Shows Peter, James and John His Glory	(17:1-13)
43.	Jesus Heals and Frees Demonized Boy	(17:14-21)
44.	Jesus Makes Third Passion Prediction	(17:22, 23)
45.	Jesus Quizzes Peter About Temple Taxes	(17:24-27)
46.	Jesus Teaches True Greatness, Temptations, Concern for Least of God's Loved Ones, and Forgiveness	(18:1-35)
47.	Jesus Teaches on Divorce	(19:1-12)

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|-----|---|---------------|
| 48. | Jesus Blesses the Little Children | (19:13-15) |
| 49. | Jesus Tests Rich Young Ruler and Encourages Apostles | (19:16-30) |
| 50. | Jesus Teaches Parable of the Eleventh Hour Servants | (20:1-16) |
| 51. | Jesus Predicts His Passion Fourth Time | (20:17-19) |
| 52. | Jesus Refuses to Establish Hierarchy | (20:20-28) |
| 53. | Jesus Heals Two Blind Men at Jericho | (20:29-34) |
| 54. | Jesus Enters in Earthly Triumph into Jerusalem | (21:1-11) |
| 55. | Jesus Cleanses Temple a Last Time and
Receives Worship | (21:12-17) |
| 56. | Jesus Curses Fig Tree and Teaches Disciples | (21:18-22) |
| 57. | Jesus Meets Challenges of Authority: Parable of Vineyard
Let Out to Unworthy Tenants | (21:23-45) |
| | Parable of Slighted Marriage Invitations | (22:1-14) |
| 58. | Jesus Answers Captious Questions | (22:15-46) |
| 59. | Jesus Attacks the Sins of the "Righteous" | (23:1-39) |
| 60. | Jesus Describes the Last Days of the Jewish State and
His Second Coming | (24:1—25:46) |
| 61. | Jesus Predicts His Own Death a Fifth Time | (26:1, 2) |
| 62. | Jesus Is Plotted Against by the Rulers | (26:3-5) |
| 63. | Jesus Is Anointed by Mary of Bethany | (26:6-13) |
| 64. | Judas Agrees with Jesus' Enemies to Betray Him | (26:14-16) |
| 65. | Jesus Celebrates His Last Passover Feast and
Institutes the Lord's Supper | (26:17-30) |
| 66. | Jesus Predicts Peter's Denials | (26:31-35) |
| 67. | Jesus Prays in Gethsemane | (26:36-46) |
| 68. | Jesus Is Arrested | (26:47-56) |
| 69. | Jesus Is Tried Before Caiaphas | (26:57-68) |
| 70. | Jesus Is Denied by Peter | (26:69-75) |
| 71. | Jesus Is Condemned by Sanhedrin | (27:1) |
| 72. | Jesus' Betrayer Commits Suicide | (27:3-10) |
| 73. | Jesus Tried Before Pilate | (27:2, 11-31) |
| 74. | Jesus Is Taken Out, Crucified and Buried | (27:32-61) |
| 75. | Pharisees Set Roman Guard to Watch Tomb | (27:62-66) |
| 76. | Jesus Arose! | (28:1-10) |
| 77. | Jesus' Guards Testify to His Resurrection | (28:11-15) |
| 78. | Jesus Appears and Commissions His Disciples | (28:16-20) |

The Gospel
of
Matthew

CHAPTER ONE

Section 1

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

TEXT: 1:1-17

1. The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
2. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren;
3. and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram,
4. and Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon; and Nahshon begat Salmon;
5. and Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;
6. and Jesse begat David the king. And David begat Solomon of her *that had been the wife* of Uriah;
7. and Solomon begat Rehoboam; and Rehoboam begat Abijah; and Abijah begat Asa;
8. and Asa begat Jehoshaphat; and Jehoshaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Uzziah;
9. and Uzziah begat Jotham; and Jotham begat Ahaz; and Ahaz begat Hezekiah;
10. and Hezekiah begat Manasseh; and Manasseh begat Amon; and Amon begat Josiah;
11. and Josiah begat Jechoniah and his brethren, at the time of the carrying away to Babylon.
12. And after the carrying away to Babylon, Jechoniah begat Shealtiel; and Shealtiel begat Zerubbabel;
13. and Zerubbabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor,
14. and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;
15. and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;
16. and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.
17. So all the generations from Abraham unto David are fourteen generations; and from David unto the carrying away to Babylon

fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon unto the Christ fourteen generations.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Matthew would begin his Gospel with the lineage of Jesus? Would it have not been much simpler to omit those difficult names and get on with the story? Why do you think so?
- b. Why would Matthew call these first 17 verses "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ" when they are not a "book" and these words do not constitute an adequate title for the entire Gospel?
- c. Do you think Matthew intended to give an exhaustive list of Jesus' ancestors? If so, why does he omit at least three names?
- d. Why does Matthew say there are fourteen generations in the three major sections of the list when there were obviously more ancestors?

PARAPHRASE

This is the record of the ancestry of Jesus Christ, a descendent of both David and Abraham:

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

Judah and his brothers

Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar

Hezron

Ram

Amminadab

Nahshon

Salmon

Boaz whose mother was Rahab

Obed whose mother was Ruth

Jesse

David the king

Solomon whose mother was Uriah's wife (Bathsheba)

Rehoboam

Abijah

Asa

Jehoshaphat

Joram

Ahaz
 Hezekiah
 Manasseh
 Amos
 Josiah
 Jechoniah and his "brothers" at the time of the deportation to
 Babylon
 Shealtiel
 Zerubbabel
 Abiud
 Eliakim
 Azor
 Zadok
 Achim
 Eliud
 Eleazar
 Matthan
 Jacob
 Joseph, the husband of Mary, who was the mother of Jesus, who
 is called "Christ."

So the whole number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen; from David to the Exile to Babylon fourteen; and from the Exile to Babylon to the Christ Himself fourteen.

NOTES

The genealogies of Jesus recorded in Matthew and Luke are apparently so bare of practical use and so full of difficulties for the modern Bible student that many usually skip them and go on with the "more important lessons which encourage faith and godliness." But the value of these records and the significance both to the modern unbeliever and Christian alike so greatly outweighs their seeming dry, forbidding content that Bible students cannot but be blessed by their study.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

A. THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR THE GENEALOGICAL CERTIFICATION.

To the western mind these first 17 verses of Matthew's Gospel seem to be a useless procedure in presenting Jesus' pedigree through which one must wade to get at the real beginning of His history. However, to the Jewish mind this is most natural, interesting and

essential. Matthew's opening words indicate that Jesus is both "son of David and son of Abraham" in an important, unique sense. God had promised the patriarchs and prophets that the Messiah would trace His lineage from these worthies. As apologetic evidence, therefore, it is imperative that Matthew indicate Jesus' lineage. (Cf. II Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-5; Jer. 23:5, 6; 33:15-18.) These prophecies, which admittedly come from God, place Matthew under obligation to show that this Jesus of Nazareth fulfills the prophecies in this primary respect, before he could proceed further. Throughout Matthew's record (12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15; 22:41-46) as well as the apostolic preaching and the writing of others (cf. Ac. 2:25-36; Ro. 1:3; II Tim. 2:8) this ancestral relation of Jesus is emphasized. Neither Matthew and his age nor we and ours should spend further useless study and futile trusting in Jesus of Nazareth if he be not "the son of David, the son of Abraham."

B. THE GENEALOGIES EMPHASIZE THE HUMANITY OF JESUS.

Jesus is truly human. The Word who was with God in the beginning became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw not only His glory, which befits that of the Father's Only Son, but we saw His gracious self-abnegation. He was not ashamed to call us brethren: He had fellowship with us sinners, although he was sinless. (II Co. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 2:5-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-10)

C. THE GENEALOGIES PROCLAIM THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.

God always keeps His word. The Jews were always a waiting people, never forgetting they were a chosen people. Often they forgot the moral responsibilities to God that that election required of them, but regardless of the long history of idolatry, decline and subjection, they never forgot their destiny rooted in the promises of God. Though man often forgets, God is faithful to His promises. What He promised to Abraham and David came to pass. (Ro. 15:8)

D. THE GENEALOGIES HINT AT THE SINFULNESS OF MEN.

As we notice the text, we shall be struck by the sinful character of important names in the list. What we see of Jesus, who was not stained with any sin, will force us to conclude that grace and goodness do not necessarily run in families, and that heritage alone could not account for the purity of Jesus. **JESUS WAS NOT PRODUCED BY THE LINE OF DAVID:** He was given to it. Certainly, it was not Matthew's purpose to clothe Jesus "with the diminishing glories of the first families of Israel," for he brings up, even if in a suggestive, veiled form, their embarrassing sins as well.

E. THE GENEALOGIES SHOW GOD'S PURPOSES IN HIS DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL.

In this rapid stroke of the pen, Matthew summarizes the history of Israel and shows that, in God's providential dealings with the Jews, there was purpose and design. God was intending and willing that certain things happen. The many unanswered questions, which were left puzzling the ancient Hebrews, are drawn together and tied to God's supreme solution: Jesus His Son. Because of these genealogies, we must view Jewish history as proceeding toward the goal of accomplishing God's predetermined plan. (Cf. Ac. 2:23; 3:17-26; Eph. 1-3)

F. THE GENEALOGIES DECLARE THAT JESUS IS NO MERE "CREATURE OF HIS ENVIRONMENT."

Some might emphasize unduly the messianic expectation of the Jews to suggest that Jesus is to be accounted for by His fulfillment of the then-current Jewish expectations; that is, being quite as human as any other man, Jesus swept into the religious vacuum created by sterile Pharisaism and by Sadducean philosophy, filling the crying need of the common people by His careful exploitation of His own extraordinary grasp of the times. These genealogies, on the other hand, clearly teach that the coming of Jesus was clearly planned and carefully prepared for; hence, He was a Child, not of the moment, but of the ages. (Study I Pet. 1:20, 21; Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 9:6, 7; Rev. 22:16.)

G. THE GENEALOGIES SUPPORT AND COMPLIMENT THE VIRGIN BIRTH NARRATIVES.

Luke records the annunciation to Mary (1:32-35) where her baby is called both "Son of the Most High," "Son of God," and "Son of David." Whatever Mary's lineage might be, though she would be the actual human parent of Jesus, yet Joseph was the head of the family, and the davidic connection of Jesus could only be established by acknowledging Jesus as legal heir of Joseph to David's throne. Thus, the two genealogies are required to show that Jesus is both the lineal Son of David by Mary, and that He is the legal heir to David by Joseph. Jesus is not the blood son of His legal father: He is the blood-line heir of the davidic throne being the grandson of David through Mary.

THE PECULIARITIES OF MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY

Attacks have been launched which question the accuracy of Matthew's record. Most fall short of their mark when Matthew's purpose for introducing the genealogy is seen.

A. THE ARTIFICIAL DIVISION OF THREE GROUPS OF FOURTEEN GENERATIONS.

The partitioning of Matthew is called "artificial" because of the omission of three generations in verse 8, where we would expect to find the additional names: Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah. Also, in verse 11, Jehoiakim is omitted. The omissions were not accidental since the OT genealogical tables were a matter of public record (See I Chron. 1-3; Neh. 7:5, 61-65; II Chron. 12:15; 31:16-19) and intense private interest, both religious and legal (See Lk. 1:5; Ac. 4:36, 37; Phil. 3:5). For this same reason, it may also be seen that Matthew makes these omissions not for advantage in argument, in which case ready refutation could be adduced from public annuals and OT chronicles. Rather, this "artificial" grouping of these well-known names furnishes three groups of fourteen names easily memorized. The early Christians, in argument with Jews, could more easily use the long, difficult list, having committed it to memory. Observe, it is Matthew who calls attention to the fact that he has so arranged the list. Matthew's purpose at this point is not primarily historical in the sense that he merely gives a precise list, but is logical in the sense that he reasons to a conclusion: "Jesus Christ (is) the son of David, the son of Abraham." Should he be charged with a deceptive motive for omitting the names, none could prove this supposed motivation, for Matthew never bases any argument upon the series of three groupings into fourteen generations each. It seems both fitting and proper to say that Matthew's "artificial" catalogue of the number of the generations was meant to apply only to this list as given, and not to the number that had actually existed.

B. THE INSERTION OF NAMES OF BROTHERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE HISTORICAL LISTS.

If he intended to give a simple, objective list, then why include the brothers of the lineal descendent? Is it because the OT so continually associates the sons of Jacob together? But, why mention the brethren of Jehoiakim in v. 11? It is difficult to see just why these extra names were introduced unless they offer another device for facilitating the memorization of the list.

C. THE INSERTION OF THE NAMES OF WOMEN INTO THE GENEALOGY.

The insertion of the names of women into the genealogy of so notable a person as the Messiah is a practice not only foreign but abhorrent to the ordinary practice. The singularity of these notices is

most clearly observed by their contrast to Jewish national self-righteousness:

1. The incestuous Tamar (Gen. 38)
2. The prostitute Rahab (if she is the same one who was contemporary with Salmon son of Nahshon, a chief of the tribe of Judah just prior to the Israelite conquest of the Promised Land (cf. Num. 1:7 and Mt. 1:5 with Josh. 2:1-21; 6:1-25))
3. The virtuous but gentile Ruth (Ru. 1:4) who belonged to the alien, hated Moabite race (cf. Dt. 23:3-6)
4. Bathsheba, the seduced but guilty wife of Uriah (II Sam. 11, 12)

The suggestion has been made as to why Matthew should have included these names: that he was answering the Jewish attacks and slanders upon the virgin birth and upon Mary's character. Accordingly, then, Matthew would be answering these slanderers of Mary by reminding them of real blemishes in the Messiah's unassailable bloodline. They should busy themselves with these real blemishes, well attested in the Jewish history, rather than slander the pure maiden Mary. However, it is difficult to admit that Matthew would, even for the sake of argument, compare the mother of Jesus with women in whose lives shame could be found. Perhaps Matthew's insertion of these names is not for comparison and analogy but rather for contrast: if even such shameful blemishes in the messianic lineage could be used by God to carry out His purposes, how much more the creative action of the Holy Spirit in the chaste virgin! However, it must again be admitted that Matthew draws no conclusions upon the basis of these inserted names.

How the Jewish ears must have stung as these women are mentioned! What could be Matthew's purpose? Could it be that:

1. The barrier between Jew and Gentile be down? Here is Ruth the virtuous Moabite and Rahab the believing Canaanite of Jericho (?) who find their places in Jesus' pedigree. It should be clear to the Jewish mind that the Messiah cannot be of unmixed blood!
2. The barriers between male and female are falling? The ordinary genealogy would have contained no names of women because they would have had no legal rights. Being regarded as a thing not a person, the mere possession of her father or husband, to be disposed of as he might choose, yet she finds her place in God's scheme of things.

3. The barriers between saint and sinner are changing? To the orthodox Pharisee, this must have been a blow, since his orthodox answer to the query "The Messiah: whose son is he?" must necessarily include those who have sinned greatly. So God is able to use for His purposes and fit into His scheme not only "the righteous," but also sinners. Observe that these women are not the only notable sinners of the list, for one need only read the record of the lives of the kings themselves to see how truly God used those unworthy instruments to accomplish His will.

HOW MATTHEW USES "SON" AND "BEGAT"

Unless we observe the usual manner of constructing ancient genealogies, we must pronounce Matthew's statement of the genealogy of Jesus as incorrect. The language of any nation or period must be understood in the light of its own peculiar usage. Genealogical terms were used in a much wider sense by the Hebrews than by ourselves. Matthew follows common usage among the Jews, when he describes, in v. 8, Joram as "begetting" Uzziah, when in reality Joram was grandfather of Uzziah at least three generations removed. (Compare the Hebrew usage in thus abbreviating genealogies: Ezra 7:1-3 contains 15 names of Ezra's ancestry whereas the same genealogy, I Chron. 6:3-14, contains 22 names.) Hence, "son of," "father of," and "begat" have broader technical meanings, which indicate adoption or some official connection or "descent" other than actual blood descent or other nearer or more remote connections. The sequences of generations often has to do with families rather than with individuals, and may represent the succession to the inheritance or headship, rather than the actual relationship of father to son. To summarize, then, we see that a man could be the "son" of another in one of the following modes:

1. Natural son. This descent and connection by birth constitutes the main line and, in any given case, has the presumption in its favor, unless clear facts to the contrary exist.
2. Grandson, or more generally, descendent (Cf. Gen. 46:26, 27)
3. Adopted son (Cf. Gen. 48:5-16; Ex. 2:10; Heb. 11:24) or "legal son."
4. Son-in-law, by marriage one becomes the "son" of his father-in-law.

5. Levirate son (Study Dt. 25:5-10 for the law and Ru. 4:1-22 for a case in point.)

So, if Matthew seems to be inaccurate due to skipping names or adding some names which are not bloodline sons directly connected with their fathers, then we will not be surprised, for he is following current usage of his time.

WHOSE GENEALOGY IS THIS?

Does this pedigree belong to Joseph? to Mary? To examine the text is but to find the obvious answer which, in turn, raises problems. "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." (1:16) If this be the pedigree of Joseph, then, why include such a list, if we are searching for a lineal descendent of David? The clearest truth taught by the narratives is that Jesus is NOT the lineal descendent of Joseph, the primary reason for which being Jesus' reported birth of the virgin. Luke, on the other hand, reports Jesus as "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli." We will deal with the problem of Joseph's father in v. 16. But, suffice it to say now, that the best solution to the problem whose genealogy this would be, is that Matthew provides us with Joseph's genealogy which indicates Jesus to be of legal kinship to David and legal heir to David's throne through His legal father, Joseph. Matthew shows that Jesus possessed the right characteristic to be the promised Messiah. He is not attempting to prove that Jesus possessed David's blood, since David's blood did not pass from Joseph to Jesus. Rather, Matthew shows that Jesus is of the right lineage *legally* to be the Messiah. This certifies one of the facts necessary to prove Jesus to be the Messiah. Luke, accordingly, provides the blood-line descent of Jesus through His mother directly from David, not, however, through the line of kings as regards the inheritance of David's throne. We may rejoice that God in His providence has so clearly brought forth the Messiah from two lines: one line from which Jesus would inherit the throne of David, but from which He could not receive the blood of David (according to Matthew's genealogy); the other line from which Jesus received the blood of David but would not inherit the throne (Luke's record).

NOTES

1:1 **The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.** This inscription at the beginning of the larger narrative of Matthew's picture of Jesus might be confused for a title of the entire record. However, in

view of the immediate context, it is better to take these words as supplying a title to the genealogical list alone. (Cf. Gen. 5:1ff) The name "Jesus" is the Savior's personal name, a name then in common use (See Lk. 3:29; Ac. 13:6; Col. 4:11). It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Joshua" (*yehôshua'*) which means "Jehovah is salvation," and is the term used for the OT Joshua in the Greek translation of the OT and in Acts 7:45 and Heb. 4:8. In Mt. 1:21 Mary is commanded by the angel to give this name to her yet unborn Son, "for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." Thus, we recognize "savior" as the usual meaning. What was to this Son of Mary a common name, was given by God to provide the title which would declare His unique position to all the world. It is the personal name of the Lord in the Gospels and the Acts, but passes into a title also, as used in the Epistles where generally it appears in combination with "Christ" or some other title. (Cf. Ro. 3:26; 1:1; I Co. 12:3; Heb. 12:8; I Pe. 1:1).

"Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah" (*Mâshîach*) as in Jn. 1:41; 4:25. This term is more a title than a proper name, the title signifying "the one anointed", an idea derived from the God-appointed practice among the Jews of anointing their prophets, priests and kings. (For examples and information on this practice, see Judg. 9:8-15; I Sam. 9:16; 10:1; 12:3-5; 26:11; Is. 61:1; Ex. 29:1-9; Lev. 8:12; Ex. 40:13-16; I Kg. 19:16). The title easily passes into a personal name by use in passages where "Christ" does not mean the Messiah in general, but a very definite Messiah, Jesus, who is called "Christ", not so much a title as a proper name. (See Ac. 2:38; 3:6; 4:10; 9:34; Ro. 1:4; 5:6; I Pe. 1:1-3, 7.)

the son of David, the son of Abraham. In these four key words, Matthew summarizes the genealogy to follow, at once drawing attention to his object: that is, showing that Jesus of Nazareth is legitimate heir of both David and Abraham, and, as such, possesses the necessary credentials for claiming the Messiahship. Because the Jews believed the prophecies that the Christ would be of the seed of David and of Abraham, the first step in convincing them that Jesus was the Christ was to demonstrate that He was a direct descendent of them.

1:2 The sources of information for the names of the first division of fourteen generations might be found in Gen. 21:1-3; 25:21-26; 29:35; 38:29; Ru. 4:18-22; I Chron. 1:34—2:15. For ease of remembering, these names contained in this section may be regarded

as "patriarchs" (Cf. Ac. 2:29). The line of descent is traced in the Hebrew manner, naming the father who begot the son.

Observe that, in the case of both Isaac and his son Jacob, neither of their brothers, Ishmael and Esau, respectively, are involved in the promises of God's Messiah, while in the case of Judah, both he and his brothers together produced the chosen nation whence sprang the Messiah. Although Judah alone represents the actual line of Jesus' descent, yet all twelve patriarchs were the direct heirs of the Messianic promise. Thus, it would seem that Matthew begins to use the names not merely or only for the list's sake, but also to epitomize the history of God's promise. We will see this again in the inclusion of the names of the women.

1:3 **Tamar.** See above on *Peculiarities, C*, in the *Preliminary Considerations*.

1:4-6 From Perez to David, the descent is traced according to Ruth 4:18-22. A problem exists at this point regarding the time element. David is described as only fourth in descent from Salmon in a period of at least 450 years (Ac. 13:18-20) from the entrance of Israel into Canaan until the beginning of the reign of Saul. Saul's reign began prior to David's birth by ten years (Cf. Ac. 13:21 with II Sa. 5:4). Thus, there are only four generations which must cover 460 years. The most likely explanation might be one of two possibilities:

1. If Matthew is copying from Ru. 4:18-22, it may be that the author of that passage omitted unimportant links in the Davidic line, while retaining only the more noted ones.
2. Or, if Matthew is copying public records, perhaps he is omitting the unimportant links in an undisputed chain.

Regarding such omissions in Matthew's list, see *A, Peculiarities* in the *Preliminary Considerations*. For a clear example of compressed genealogy: Ex. 6:16-20; I Chron. 23:12-15.

The ancestral line has now reached royalty, but it has also seen grave, public sin. See how Matthew introduces David's sin: "her that had been the wife of Uriah" and in this phrase reminds of adultery, murder, and death of the first child. Though Bathsheba was David's queen, she belonged to Uriah.

1:6-11 These men are all kings whose names are found in the list of I Chron. 3:10-19, or of course in the histories of these kings

in the two books of Kings and Chronicles. No comment is needed on the names in the list except where some special problem requires it.

1:8 Here Matthew omits three names: Ahaziah (II Kg. 8:26), Joash (II Kg. 12:2), and Amaziah (II Kg. 14:2). Neither the length of their reign nor their outstanding wickedness can be assigned as Matthew's reason for omitting them, for there is no particularly obvious significance about the length of their reign or about their sins, any more than that of the other wicked men which are included. These men certainly deserve to be left out of the pedigree of the Messiah, but no more than some retained in the list. It becomes obvious that Matthew purposely drops these three kings to form three groups of ancestors comprised of the same number of names. It is not likely that Matthew made an unintentional error by omitting these names, for both friend and foe would have detected the error, and have demanded a correction in line with the OT chronicles.

1:11 **Josiah begat Jechoniah.** Here again Matthew omits another name: "Josiah begat Jehoiakim; Jehoiakim begat Jechoniah" we would have expected him to say. Here are the problems:

1. Jechoniah is not the immediate son of Josiah (I Chron. 3:10-17).
2. Jechoniah apparently had no such "brethren" as mentioned here.
3. Jechoniah would, apparently, have then to be counted twice in order for Matthew's scheme of fourteen names to stand good in the third group; that is, Jechoniah would then be number 14 in the second group and number one in the third.

Several solutions are possible to harmonize the known facts:

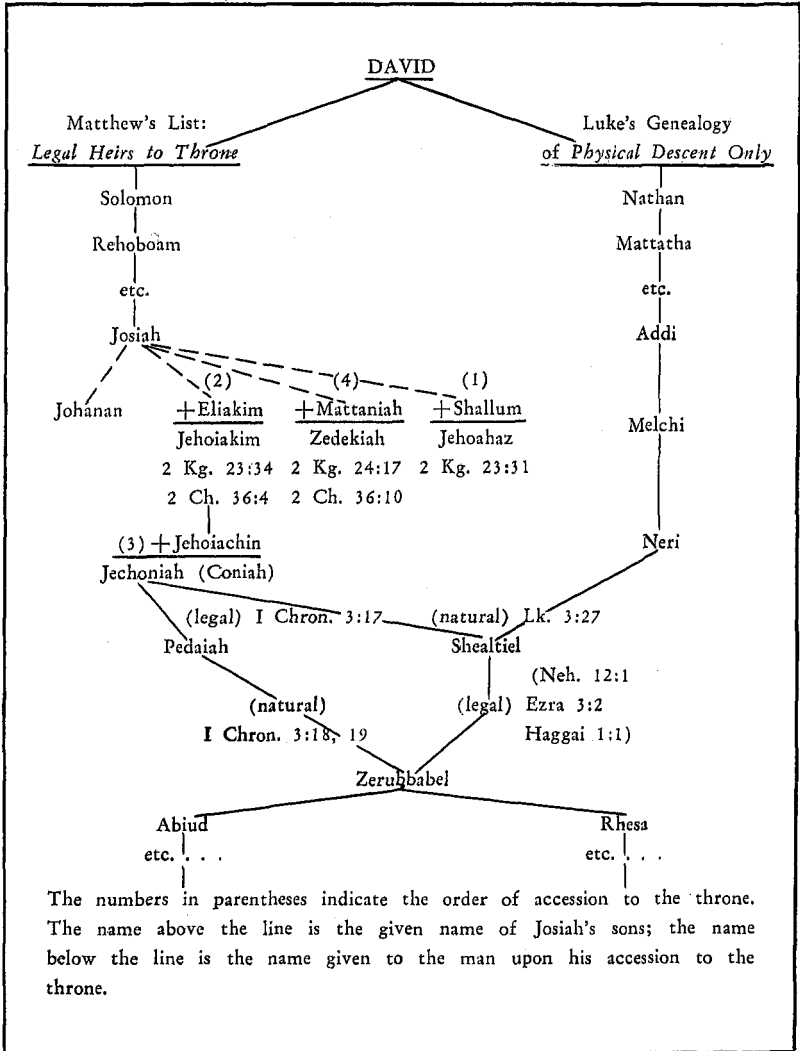
1. Jechoniah is the "son" of Josiah in the broad sense of the word, peculiar to Hebrew usage.
2. The term "brethren" could also be taken in the broader sense of "relatives" or royal kindred, an interpretation which fits quite significantly into Jechoniah's history. (See chart below.)
3. Because the list is apparently simplified "for memorization," it would be possible to count Jechoniah twice, although some have suggested the more likely solution that David, rather than Jechoniah, is to be counted twice. See comment on verse 17.

4. The suggestion by some, that a scribal error has occurred in the copying of this text, raises more problems than it solves. The suggested "original text" is supposed to have read: "Josiah begat Jehoiakim and his brethren, and Jehoiakim begat Jechoniah," but, when copied, "Jehoiakim" and "Jechoniah" were confused and the resulting text reads as we have it in the American Standard Version. This solution raises the following problems which are not answered by the solution:
- a. There is scant textual evidence for such a supposed miscopy. The bulk of the evidence for including the name of Jehoiakim (i.e. MSS M, Theta, Lambda and 33) is from the ninth century, while the sole witness of Irenaeus in the Latin translation of his work suggests in the late second century that Jehoiakim's name appeared in the text.
 - b. The actual reading of the above-mentioned texts does not mention the brothers with Jehoiakim, as supposed by those who suggest a scribal error. There is thus another textual problem to explain. Jehoiakim had the brothers, not Jechoniah; so why are they mentioned with Jechoniah, even in the above-cited manuscripts?
 - c. The mere substitution of the name of Jehoiakim in the best Greek text as it now stands would not solve the problem, for there would be a logical break of connection between verses 11 and 12. The word "begat" would be omitted between the substituted "Jehoiakim" (v. 11) and his son Jechoniah (v. 12). Such a substitution would read: "Josiah begat Jehoiakim and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon. Then after the Babylonian deportation Jechoniah begat Salathiel . . ." Note that the phrase important to this solution is missing: "Jehoiakim begat Jechoniah."

Therefore, it would seem that there has been no evidence of scribal error. Harmonization is possible on simpler grounds.

At the deportation to Babylon. With this phrase Matthew indicates that he is not transcribing a mere list of names, rather, he is summing up Israel's history. The Jewish readers would recognize the tangled, tragic history and would interpret the phrase "Jechoniah and his brethren" as referring to the general period between Josiah and Jechoniah. Two of Josiah's sons reigned before Jechoniah (Jehoahaz

and Jehoiakim, Jechoniah's uncle and father, respectively) and one reigned after him (Zedekiah, Jechoniah's uncle). The following chart will help clarify the history involved and provide a solution to a problem in verse 12:



1:12 **Jechoniah begat Shealtiel.** Here Shealtiel appears as the son of Jechoniah, while in Luke 3:27 as the son of Neri. Elsewhere he is described as the son of Jechoniah (I Chron. 3:17). Because the name, Neri, is peculiar to Luke, not being found in the OT, we are unable to relate the name to known persons in the history without guessing. The appearance of Shealtiel in the two lists with two different fathers mentioned is not surprising in view of the many ways one man may be the "son" of another: adopted, son-in-law, levirate son, legal heir, grandson. Jechoniah, Jehoiachin, Coniah are but names for the same person (Jer. 2:24; 52:31; II Chron. 36:8, 9; I Chron. 3:17).

It is at this point, however, that a supposed contradiction appears between the prophecies of Jeremiah and the genealogical lists of both Matthew and the OT genealogists. Jeremiah writes: "Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out . . ." (36:30) Again, "Thus saith Jehovah, Write this man (Jechoniah) childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah." (22:30) Therefore, concerning both the father and the son, God promises that neither shall have an heir on the throne, yet it is obvious that Jechoniah, a son of Jehoiakim did sit on the throne of David, and that Jechoniah actually fathered seven sons (I Chron. 3:17, 18; II Chron. 36:9, 10). Regarding these two seeming problems, the solution may be:

1. Concerning the prophecy about Jehoiakim, it may be said that his being without heir to the throne of David was fulfilled by his lack of a grandson who would be rightful heir. In other words, his dynasty would be broken by lack of a grandson. However, the ascension of Jehoiachin (Jechoniah, Coniah) to the throne could hardly be called a "reign," or a "sitting on the throne," inasmuch as he was immediately besieged in Jerusalem, compelled to surrender after three months, then go into exile to Babylon.
2. The deportation to Babylon was tragic history of weighty significance: the throne of the house of David is lost! Though Jechoniah sired seven sons, none of them sat on David's throne, reigning in Judah. Jeremiah's prophecy would then mean simply "legal proscription" and not actual childlessness.

keep a lively interest in the public records of the davidic line. It is therefore an empty objection to suggest that Matthew could not have obtained the full genealogy, especially the latter portions, from authentic sources. There was also the mosaic legislation regarding inheritance (Lev. 25:13-34; 27:14-25) which restored lands which had been sold, at the end of every fifty years, to the heirs of the original owners. This, in turn, would require a registry of genealogy to be kept in every town for the accurate completion of just such a restoration of property. There is certainly nothing regarding Matthew's use of authentic sources that would justify even one doubt concerning the reliability of his list. Then, the collapse of the Jewish nation and the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 A.D., and the final and irreparable demolishing of the temple—all these collaborated to eliminate the further necessity of keeping genealogical records: the priesthood is thereby forever prohibited from serving at a now non-existent altar and all hopes for a Son of David who would "restore the kingdom to Israel" are forever crushed.

1:16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. With this verse the sonorous rhythm of the preceding generations comes to a halt. We are awakened to the change as Matthew does not say "Joseph begat Jesus." Rather Joseph, legal heir of David's throne, was the husband of the mother of the Messiah, Jesus. Granted, the English translation might allow doubt as to the true, grammatical antecedent of the expression "of whom", that is, as to whether Joseph or Mary is intended. However, the best attested Greek texts of this phrase all unite in using a feminine pronoun. Therefore, on the basis of the fleshly relationship alone, Jesus is the Son of Mary, not Joseph: Jesus and Joseph are totally unrelated by blood. Not only the feminine pronoun but also the following context pronounce this fact.

The record of Matthew has been questioned by appeal to a late Syriac translation from the Greek text, which reads: "and Joseph, unto whom was betrothed a virgin Mary, begat Jesus, the one called Christ." This late reading, no earlier than 400 A.D., is seized upon by those who would reject the idea of a virgin birth. Thus, Matthew is made to say that Joseph begat Jesus. However, Matthew did not in fact say so, because:

1. This reading, found only in the Siniatic Syriac translation is too late. All other Greek texts and versions support the

common rendering and antedate the Syriac by at least 100 years.

2. The Siniatic Syriac is only a translation, not a Greek copy of Matthew's original.
 - a. The translator might have erred in translation from his Greek copy into Syriac.
 - b. It is difficult to recreate the original Greek manuscript reading with complete certainty, which the translator used.
 - c. But supposing no error in translation and supposing a faithful translation into Syriac of the Greek text, we cannot yet be sure that the Greek text before the translator was a faithful copy of the original document written by Matthew.

However, even with undeniable evidence against such a reading as "Joseph begat Jesus," yet such a reading could stand as if stated by Matthew without damage to the fact of the virgin birth. Why?

1. Because the one ancient text which contains the reading, also calls Mary a "virgin," a fact which would prove to be a glaring contradiction unless "begat" be understood in some sense other than physical generation.
2. The word "begat" as used in the genealogy of Matthew is clearly not to be taken solely in the physical sense. As shown above, the word "begat" means simply "had as a legal heir." If Matthew had written "Joseph begat Jesus," then he certainly would have intended it with that meaning, for certainly the context (1:18-25) excludes the possibility of attributing paternity to Joseph.

Yet, as a matter of fact, Matthew did not say "Joseph begat Jesus." Two principle items should be abundantly clear: namely, that the question of the historicity of the virgin birth of Jesus does not rest upon the peculiar reading of an ancient but late manuscript, nor does it rest upon a wooden interpretation of "begat." Rather, it rests squarely upon the entire narrative in Matthew, as well as that of Luke, as recorded with the abundant documentary attestation of the very best manuscripts.

1:17 Fourteen generations. We have seen that Matthew himself makes the generations come out with exactly fourteen names, while the actual history involved would require more names, both in the

second and third sections of his list. Obviously, his list is no mere copy from the public annals, but is an adaptation intelligently and purposefully designed. But to what end? These purposes have been suggested:

1. By securing equal numbers of ancestors in each of the three groups of patriarchs, kings and common people, perhaps Matthew wished the reader to understand that all three groups were of equal importance regarding the relation to the Messiah.
2. Perhaps by his arrangement and additions Matthew intended to epitomize the history of Israel, relating the coming Christ to the context of Israel's history and God's covenantal promises.
3. Perhaps Matthew arranged the list for easy memorization, so that Christians could present the important evidence to the Jewish mind, which would prove that Jesus belonged to the house of David and thus was a proper person of whom to expect other messianic credentials. If Jesus be not the Son of David with the necessary legal certification, then a great cloud of doubt and uncertainty must ever attend our trust in Him. But because of Matthew's ingenious arrangement, we are able to have at our fingertips the very material which will strengthen our faith in Jesus as the true Son of David, the Christ, and which will strengthen our confidence in God as a promise-keeping God. We have the evidence which helps us to appreciate the condescension of Jesus to dwell among us, and prepares us for the virgin birth narratives.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the various problems connected with the genealogies in Matthew and Luke.
2. What is the purpose or significance of the genealogies of Jesus?
3. What are the extra names or persons mentioned in Matthew's list? Why are they there?
4. How do the two genealogies work together to fulfill the prophecies of Jeremiah and Psalms which had seemed to contradict each other?
5. In what different ways could one man be a "son of" another?
6. What is the meaning of the word "Jesus"? "Christ"?
7. What of the title in verse one: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, etc.?" Does "the book" refer to the entire gospel of

Matthew or only to the genealogy? Why is it called "the book of the generation"?

8. Into what basic divisions did Matthew divide the names?
9. Where could Matthew find the names in his lists to verify the accuracy of his writing?
10. What names does Matthew omit? Was this omission accidental; or, what good purpose could be served by such omissions?
11. Do omissions from Matthew's list frustrate the purpose of the list?
12. Why were the Hebrews so meticulous about keeping genealogies?
13. Is it possible for modern Jews to prove descent from David for any modern claimant of the Messiahship? Why?
14. Why is finding a practical solution to these problems important to the Bible student and important to Christian faith?

Section 2

THE ANNUNCIATION TO JOSEPH

TEXT: 1:18-25

18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.
19. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.
20. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
21. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.
22. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying,
23. Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us.
24. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife;
25. and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Mary is "betrothed" to Joseph, why does the angel speak of her as his "wife"?
- b. Why did not Joseph believe that Mary was an expectant mother by the power of the Holy Spirit? Had not Mary told him of the angel's visit to her?
- c. Why was Joseph convinced by what occurred in the dream?
- d. What do you think would be thought of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth?
- e. Why do you think God chose this method to bring His Son into the world? Or, could Jesus have been the Savior of men had He been the natural son of Joseph and Mary? Why do you think so?

PARAPHRASE

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in the following manner: When His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before their marriage (while she was yet a virgin), she was discovered to be an expectant mother whose pregnancy was caused by the Holy Spirit. Whereupon, Joseph, her husband, because he was an upright man and because he was unwilling to expose her to contempt, decided to divorce her quietly. But while he was turning the matter over in his mind, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for her child has been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to name Him Jesus, because it is He who shall save His people from their sins."

All of this occurred with the result that it fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through Isaiah the prophet—"Behold, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel." ("Immanuel" is a Hebrew word meaning "God with us.")

So, when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had directed him. He received Mary into his house, but had no intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

SUMMARY

Joseph, unaware of the real cause of his fiancée's pregnancy, decided upon a quiet divorce. God clarified her position to him and he, in turn, received her as his wife. The result of the entire episode is the fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14.

NOTES

1:18 Here Matthew proceeds to narrate the actual historical facts for which the genealogy has so fitly prepared; the birth of the Christ who was both Son of David and Son of God. Let it not be thought that what Matthew proceeds to record are the very first events, for the Evangelist Luke, with another emphasis in mind, records several events which must have preceded the annunciation to Joseph by at least six months. They are the annunciation to Zachariah regarding the coming birth of John the Baptist; the announcement to Mary that she was to become the mother of God's Son; Mary's visit to Elizabeth and return to Nazareth. Study Luke 1 to appreciate fully what follows here.

When his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph. The betrothal had taken place before the event now narrated, but **before they came together.** The Jewish betrothal involved a covenant made in the presence of witnesses or the solemn promise was also written (Cf. Mal. 2:14) and was equivalent to a marriage vow. By virtue of this betrothal, the couple became husband and wife in a relationship which could only be terminated by death or divorce or unfaithfulness (see Dt. 22:22-24). The ceremony of engagement was completed by a benediction and a cup of wine. From that moment Mary became the betrothed wife of Joseph, although several months might intervene before their coming together as married partners. Apparently no celebration and feasting accompanied the engagement ceremony, that being reserved for the joyous occasion when the groom would bring home his bride. Like any man in love, Joseph looked forward to that festive day when he, with his friends, would go to bring Mary to their future home. It was then that tragedy dashed his joy, shattering his hope in heart-rending anguish:

She was discovered to be pregnant. Naturally, Mary knew the reason for her pregnancy, even as the angel had announced to her in chaste and delicate language,

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High . . . The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Lk. 1:31-35)

Matthew squarely meets the criticism of skepticism by the unswerving

declaration that Mary's condition was produced by the Holy Spirit. He is not saying that this latter fact was part of the discovery, for obviously Joseph knows nothing of the Holy Spirit's influence in Mary's case.

But if Mary had already been informed by the angel of the miracle of the supernatural conception, would she not have repeated to Joseph what the angel had said to her? But would he have believed so wonderful a solution to his anguish? It is most likely to suppose that upon Joseph's questioning Mary, she told him of the angelic visit. The very idea of a virgin birth, or, more correctly, of a virgin conceiving is unique by its very nature. Why should Joseph have believed her? However much he must have trusted Mary, only a communication from God could remove all the questions from his heart and provide the assurance he would need for the hard days to come. Mary could only wait upon God for her vindication in the eyes of Joseph. The heavenly messenger who had spoken to her might also speak to her beloved.

Further, we are not told who made the discovery of Mary's condition or when the discovery was made. Several conditions help us to visualize the desperate difficulty of Mary's pregnancy in Nazareth:

1. The mosaic legislation called for the death of any espoused woman found unfaithful (Dt. 22:23, 24). While it is true that the Jews did not legally possess the power of the death sentence during that period of Roman occupation (see Jn. 18:31), yet it is difficult to see how this "obviously unfaithful" bride (as regarded by the sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued gossips of Nazareth) could have escaped notice.
2. Neither Matthew nor Luke reveal how long after the miraculous conception Joseph received Mary as his wife. His perplexity caused by Mary's condition does seem to indicate that her pregnancy had continued some time before the marriage took place.
3. From the fact that it must be Joseph to decide not to expose Mary for a public example, we may assume Mary's condition to be unknown to others but Joseph and Mary themselves. Surely, had the unsympathetic eyes of the neighbors in Nazareth noticed, or had the unbelieving family of Mary known her dilemma, they would have exposed her and her Son to the slander of an illegitimate birth.

4. Nor do we know exactly the order of events from the angel's message to Mary until Joseph received her as his wife. When did the miraculous conception occur—immediately after Mary's submission to the divine will, or quite a bit later? Did Joseph receive Mary into his home before or after she visited Elizabeth for three months? (Lk. 1:39-56)
5. The Nazarenes who attack Jesus' presumptions to divine authority (Lk. 4:16-30; Mt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:1-6), as well as other enemies, do not give even the slightest hint of a slander regarding a "premature", thus illegitimate, birth. Rather, they refer to the mere obscurity of His birth as a child of the carpenter, Joseph.

Harmonizing the two narratives of Matthew and Luke in such a way as to produce a natural account of the course of events, we see the annunciation to Zachariah that he is to have a son, John; the betrothal of Mary and Joseph, which may have taken place before or after the annunciation to Zachariah; the annunciation to Mary that she is to have a son, Jesus (this annunciation occurs six months after that to Zachariah); the visit of Mary with Elizabeth in Judea which lasted three months and her return to Nazareth; upon returning to Nazareth, Mary is discovered to be "with child;" the annunciation to Joseph. Thus, there would yet remain only about six months for Mary before Jesus would be born, when Joseph learned of her condition.

1:19 **Joseph her husband, because he was an upright man and being unwilling to expose her to contempt, decided to divorce her quietly.** Of what sort character is this man whom God has chosen to be the foster-parent of His Son? Feel the pain in Joseph's entire being as he is torn between his deep love for Mary and his keen consciousness of what is right before God! As a true Israelite, Joseph must not consummate his marriage with Mary under the circumstances as he understood them, supposing Mary to have committed adultery. Yet, how truly he loved his espoused for what he had always known of her as the pure, gentle maiden. Only two courses lay open to Joseph now, both ending in divorce:

1. Public exposure, charging Mary with adultery, making her a public example, subjecting her to whatever Jewish law might have been in force at the time (if not the death penalty of Dt. 22:23-24);

2. Or, resolve to take advantage of a Mosaic statute which allowed an unconditional and unexplained separation at the will of the husband (Dt. 24:1). In writing the "bill of divorcement" he could be freer to state or omit the actual cause that prompted him to divorce Mary.

This latter determination stood out clearly to Joseph, that, if it must be, her letter of divorce would be handed to her privately in the presence of the two required witnesses.

1:20 **But while he was turning the matter over in his mind**, i.e. during that anxious contending of feelings and the delayed resolve to divorce Mary, God intervened: **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**. That assurance which Joseph could scarcely have dared to hope for is now conveyed to him in a dream-vision. By visions and dreams God had often spoken. (Cf. Gen. 20:3; 31:11, 24; 37:5; chap. 40; 41:1; I Kgs. 3:5; Dan. 7:1; Job 4:13-15) Matthew mentions four: this one, a second one to Joseph (2:13); one to the Wise-men (2:12); and perhaps the dream to Pilate's wife (27:19). We may imagine Joseph unable to sleep, being deeply troubled as he contemplated his course until at last his thoughts surrendered to sleep. Then the angel appeared. The scriptures do not declare how those dreams by which God communicates to the dreamer are to be distinguished from those unreal images which ordinarily appear in sleep. Ordinary dreams are commonly characterized by great disjunctions with reality, are without sense or the normal representation of reality. Observe, on the other hand, the direct relation to reality seen in this dream:

1. Accepting the reality of the supernatural realm upon the evidence for its existence in the data provided by the well-attested history contained in the biblical record, we observe here that God simply sends an angel messenger to communicate a message from the spirit-world of reality to the sense-experienced world.
2. The message given is directly related to Joseph's immediate problem, to the Old Covenant Scriptures, and to the plan of God for man's redemption.

This reality of Joseph's dream as a reception of God's communication cannot be gainsaid by appeal to the irrelevant evidence of normal dream patterns. To reduce this divine communication to a non-supernaturalistic explanation by saying that Joseph's "vision" is easily

resolved by analysis of his emotional disturbance and the undigested material in his stomach, is nothing short of attacking the entire historical fabric of Matthew's work. Joseph did not "dream up" this angel. God sent the angel and communicated to him the message. The God who sends such messages to men is thoroughly able to make the dreamer know their reality.

Joseph, son of David. Indeed, Joseph was a descendent of the royal house, as attested by his genealogy. This is the occasion for him to prove himself a true son of David, possessed of the faith of David. Now princely things would be expected of him: to be the protector of heaven's Prince. This he must do in spite of his poverty and obscurity.

Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. What authority could be higher or what directions clearer? Joseph was not to fear for Mary's virtue and purity nor fear future betrayals. The incredible story told by Mary of the angel's appearance to her and the miraculous conception were exactly as represented after all. Joseph now would be in no way compromising his conscience, condoning sin, risking his own future happiness, nor otherwise doing something doubtful by fulfilling his promise to take Mary as his wife. The Holy Spirit is really the Father of her child.

1:21 She shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. The wonderful tidings of the angel contains three great truths:

1. The miraculous foreknowledge of the sex of the child to be born. The seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) is to be a boy. No father or mother can ever accurately know about any of their children before birth. How the definite concern of God for every particular part of the incarnation makes itself known!
2. The thrilling revelation in the name of the child. God is formally regarding Joseph as the legal father of the unborn child, for it must be Joseph, as Jesus' foster-parent, who will give the name to the Boy at His birth. However, the choice of the name remains the right of Him who is the true Father, and the name He chooses is profoundly full of meaning. The name JESUS means "Jehovah is savior" or "Salvation of

Jehovah" and, although it is a relatively common name (see on 1:1), yet it is especially significant as the name of **this** child.

3. Clear announcement of the future ministry of the child. Though there were many who bore the name of Jesus in those days, whose parents, hoping in God to save His people Israel, so named their sons, yet the divine messenger emphasizes, "It is **HE**—He alone—who shall save." No parent ever knows exactly what their babe will do in life, but God knew what this babe would do and named Him accordingly. The phrase "his people," as Joseph would have understood it, evokes the image of political deliverance from Israel's enemies and of freedom from the ills that servitude brings. But Jesus shall save His people "from their sins," the real evils from which they suffered. Yet, in delivering the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" to whom Jesus was principally sent (Mt. 15:24), He would lay the basis for the salvation of the Gentiles also (Jn. 10:16).

1:22 **Now all this is come to pass.** Did Matthew say this, or did the angel? The Greek verb is perfect tense (present abiding result of a past action) and is difficult to interpret as to whether the time involved is present regarding the angel's speaking or Matthew's writing. If the former, then we behold the Holy Spirit who prophesied these words through the prophet Isaiah, now interpreting the prophecy through the angel. If the latter, then we witness the same Spirit at work through Jesus' Apostle. In either case, the full authority of God stands behind the speaker and the interpretation of the prophecy given. **That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.** Here is clear, convincing evidence of the supernatural inspiration of Isaiah's prophecy: the obvious fulfillment of what was predicted and the declaration of an inspired apostle that Isaiah's message came from God. This expression is frequently used by Matthew throughout his Gospel to demonstrate the veracity of God in graciously keeping his promises. Study these prepositions carefully, for they reveal the process of divine revelation: "spoken **BY** the Lord **THROUGH** the prophet." God revealed to Isaiah what was to happen, and now brings it to pass as predicted. Although God could have worked in human history without any advance notice to men, yet He chose to announce His plans in advance in order that men might be aware of the supreme importance that God placed upon His plans

and prepare themselves for Jesus' coming. God did this also that men might have the full assurance that God has spoken in their history both in the unequivocal prophecy and in its well-attested fulfillment.

1:23 Just because a virgin birth is without example among men, let it never be supposed that it was unknown to God! During a threatening national crisis when the combined armies of Israel and Syria launched a concerted attack against Judah's capital, Jerusalem, her king and her people trembled. (Study II Kgs. 16 and Isa. 7 to appreciate the full impact of this historical situation.) Isaiah is sent to the frightened king to promise divine deliverance on the basis of belief of God's willingness to help (Isa. 7:3-9). The idolatrous king was urged to seek a miraculous sign from God which would confirm His promise. With a pious phrase he refused. Soundly rebuking the hardened king, Isaiah rejoined that God Himself would provide the sign anyway: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isa. 7:14) Continuing, Isaiah declared that the sign lay in the fact that before this virgin's son should reach the age of discretion, the kingdoms of Syria and Israel would be destroyed. Although God would bring deliverance, it would come no thanks to Ahaz, nor to his son, nor to the house of David generally as represented in that perverted generation, but rather a nameless maiden would give birth to the true Immanuel.

But, it is asked, can this interpretation given by Matthew (or by the angel) be certainly the true one? The following objections are often urged against such an application of Isaiah 7:14 to the virgin birth of Jesus:

1. "The Greek term *parthenos*, a virgin or maiden, is misleading, as the Hebrew term *'almah* simply means 'an adult woman,' and is certainly by no means confined to virgins." Has Matthew then falsified the evidence and concocted, by deliberate mistranslation, the virgin birth fiction? No, he is rightly following the then-current Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint version of 285 B.C. The Jewish scholars, who prepared that translation, used the term *parthenos* to render the Hebrew *'almah*, and they could scarcely be accused of endeavoring to create a fictitious support for a virgin birth of Jesus. Rather, they were intending to give the true meaning of the word as used in Hebrew by Isaiah.

2. "Isaiah 7:14 was not interpreted by the ancient Synagogue in a Messianic sense, so the passage cannot be taken as referring to a 'virgin-born Messiah.' Such a theory should be more appropriately explained as the zealous search of Jewish Christians for Messianic proof-texts, their striking upon Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy and their constructing a virgin-birth theory as its supposed fulfillment." Indeed, it might seem strange that if the passage really be a prophecy of the Messiah's virgin birth, that the Jews should have so completely failed to interpret it in that way. However, they clearly missed the vicarious sufferings and death of the Messiah as foreseen in Isa. 53 or in the graphic descriptions of Psalm 22. The inability of the Jewish scholars to grasp the unity between God's Messiah as the ruling, victorious Son of David sitting upon David's throne, and God's Christ as the sacrificed Lamb of God, the Suffering Servant, must not color the true interpretation of the predictions. The suggestion, that Jewish-Christian enthusiasm invented the supposed virgin-birth fulfillment to Isaiah's words, fails to supply an acceptable substitute "sign" to king Ahaz. That is, if a miraculous virgin birth were not the actual intent of the Spirit speaking through the prophet, an event which would be especially clear as a sign after the event actually occurred, they where is the force of the sign Isaiah offered Ahaz? Why should an ordinary birth be regarded as a "sign"?
3. "The '*almah* or 'young woman' who is meant is Isaiah's wife and the son to be born is Isaiah's." But four objections immediately arise to this solution:
- a. The prophecy declares that a *virgin* (LXX and Matthew) is to bear a son; Isaiah's wife could hardly be called a *virgin*. The proof is entirely sufficient to establish *virgin* as the proper translation. If it were his wife to which he referred, he could hardly have expressed himself in a more ambiguous manner.
 - b. There is no further allusion made to any son of the prophet by the name Immanuel or anything similar. A sign based upon the prophet's own family affairs would have been, at best, one of a very precarious nature.

- c. It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive how, in such a context, a woman who had been long married, like the prophet's own wife, could be called "a young maiden of marriageable age" without any explanation.
- d. No child born in the time of Isaiah possessed the many attributes which are predicted of the Messiah in Isaiah's fuller context: The child is born whose endless, good government proceeded from the throne of David, and is entitled Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God (cf. "God with us," Immanuel), Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. (9:6, 7) The child is to be the branch out of the root of Jesse, upon whom the Spirit of Jehovah should rest and whose beneficent reign ultimately brings true peace. (11:1-8)
4. Another interpretation, which attempts to discredit Matthew, finds the '*almah*' in Abijah, the wife of Ahaz and mother of Hezekiah. Hezekiah, the righteous reformer, thus becomes the promised child. However, Hezekiah must have already been born before the commencement of his father's reign (II Chron. 28:1, 27; 29:1) during which the prophecy of a child to be born of a virgin is given. Nothing else in the context draws attention to Hezekiah. Again, how could his mother be the "young maiden"?

Such interpretation which would attempt to discredit the inspired Apostle's appropriate quotation of Isaiah's prophecy finds its basic origin, not in sound Bible exegesis, but in a pseudo-scientific anti-supernaturalism. The translation of the Hebrew '*almah*' is not the prime difficulty. The real entanglement lies in a disbelief in predictive prophecy and its historic fulfillment or a disbelief in the power of God to bring about Jesus' supernatural birth or else in the wilful desire to reject the unique Sonship of Jesus.

And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us. It might be thought strange that the prophecy quoted predicts that the child so born is to be called *Immanuel*, while the angel specifies to Joseph that the child is to be named *Jesus*. The fact that Matthew offers no comment upon this difference plainly suggests that there is no problem. The term *Immanuel* is properly the title of Him whose proper name is *Jesus*. Other titles are to be found in Isa. 9:6, although Jesus was not known by these during

His earth-life. The earth-shaking significance of this announcement is that it reveals our God, discontented to sit above the heavens and deal with His creation at long distance, coming down to tabernacle among men. The finest comment is still that of Phil. 2:5-10; Heb. 2:14-18 and Jn. 1:1-14. The very Word who was God is now to become flesh and dwell among men! These, too, are tidings of great joy which are for all people.

1:24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel commanded him, and took unto him his wife. All his doubts resolved and his mind divinely set at rest, Joseph could no longer hesitate. His immediate duty to Mary and the unborn Child required an immediate marriage which would give Mary his good name and would save the Child the reproach of an illegitimate birth. It is not known at what point during the pregnancy the marriage took place, nor how many persons were aware of her condition. Thus, it is impossible to say with certitude whether this couple suffered much public shame and abuse as their (apparently) fabricated story of visions of angels was (apparently) disbelieved as an invalid excuse. It would seem that the whole phenomenon of Jesus' life is better explained if He grew up in what from the human point of view, especially that of the Nazarenes, was a blameless home. And the attitude of His contemporaries both toward Him and the household in which He had lived does seem to be more natural if the conduct of Mary and Joseph was of a really, and not merely apparently, worthy kind. Above all, Joseph acknowledged Jesus as his legal Son. Here is to be found the real barrier against slander. If Joseph was really the "righteous man" he is said to be (1:19), his character would be known and his acknowledgement of the Child the best shield against any likelihood of slander. Further, according to Luke's narrative, the birth of Jesus occurred at a place remote from Nazareth, where Mary would not be under the gaze of prying eyes. Nor is the time known from the departure from Nazareth for Bethlehem during the census until the time of the return to Nazareth from Egypt. (Cf. Lk. 2:1-39) So an apparently early time of birth would not necessarily have ever been known.

The next morning and the days following must have been days of joy as Joseph reported his dream to his beloved and proceeded immediately to bring his wife to his home and thus consummate their marriage begun at the time of their betrothal. Far beyond all earthly

joys was their supreme moral satisfaction of being submitted to God's will and of being permitted to become the guardians of God's Son.

1:25 and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS. Normally the consummation of marriage would include marital relations ("to know" is a Hebrew euphemism for sexual relations; cf. Lk. 1:34). The revelations given to Joseph and Mary concerning the divine nature and future of the child apparently caused Joseph to forego his marital right; thus, he kept his wife a virgin until the birth of the Baby.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

1. *As a matter of RECORD.* The text of Matthew which contains the unequivocal narration of the virgin birth of Jesus possesses the same unanimous documentary attestation as the rest of the matthaean history. There is no textual evidence that even suggests that the history of the virgin birth might be the "fanciful invention of later, uncritical Christians who desired to clothe the history of their Master's birth with supernatural elements entirely unknown to Mary and Joseph." There can be little doubt that the first chapter of Matthew has always formed the original beginning of the book, since there is no full Greek manuscript of Matthew that does not contain this section, notwithstanding some minor textual variants within the passage.

2. *As a matter of HISTORY.* The announcement of the virgin birth of Jesus is a matter of historico-biographical fact. The account makes no attempt to explain or justify a doctrine of incarnation or a virgin-birth doctrine or the like. Rather it is rigidly confined to the matter of fact concerned. What Matthew writes is an event wholly real or totally imagined, completely true or entirely false. As a historical statement it cannot be insignificant or irrelevant. If it contributes to our information about the incarnation or else seriously mutilates the truth, the virgin birth narrative cannot remain a matter of historical indifference.

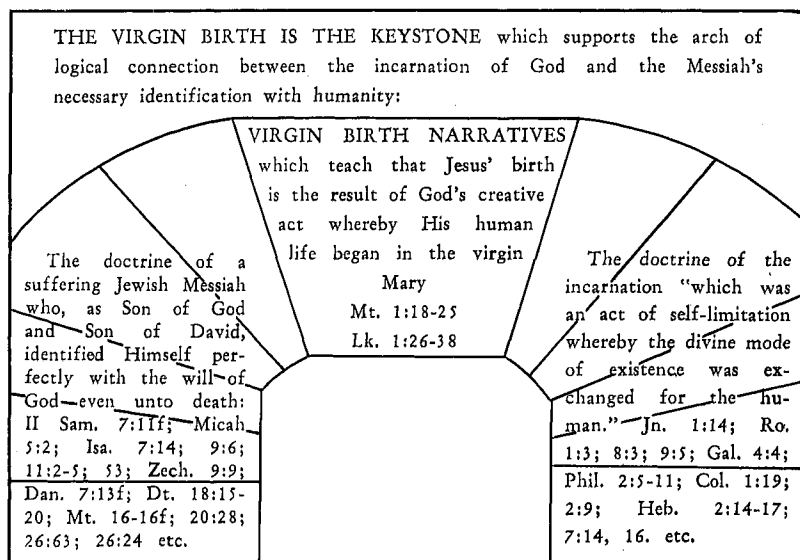
To the leaders of the early Church these facts held utmost importance, for the integrity of their personal character is brought into question, if they fabricated the virgin birth story and succeeded in foisting it upon the Church so early as to dominate its scripture and mold the form of its creed. These men were not the kind of men to accept uncritically or proclaim presumptuously such stories which lacked positive and authoritative certification and which, in turn, could be used in any way by unbelievers to discredit their Master or His

family. That such certification must have been used is seen from the nature of the material: it contains information that could only have come from the principle characters who did the deeds and experienced the marvelous events told in the history. To charge the leaders of the early Church with fraud on the basis of their supposed imposture on so grand a scale as to produce the universal and instantaneous acceptance of the supposedly unauthenticated legend as part of the authoritative documents which narrate the life and ministry of Jesus, is completely unwarranted. The story could not have been honestly composed nor sincerely published as having been derived from any other source than the persons who could have guaranteed its truthfulness.

To those of the gospel writers and other NT penmen who do not mention the virgin birth event, the evidence already presented by Matthew and Luke rested upon a sufficient basis as to require no other artificial strengthening. Nothing negative can be proved about the so-called "silence" of John and of Paul on the subject. The fact that they do not mention the supernatural birth of Jesus cannot be construed to mean that they therefore did not know of it. The truth is better stated: they had not the occasion to treat the virgin birth. Rather, they teach as might be expected of men who were thoroughly acquainted with the fact. The doctrine they preach of the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14) and of the Christ "who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men," (Phil. 2:5-11) becomes comprehensible only in the light of the facts narrated by Matthew and Luke, and form a tacit acknowledgement of their veracity.

The fact that even Matthew and Luke, who do narrate the supernatural conception and birth, do not draw any conclusions from it nor teach any doctrine based upon it, certainly argues for its historical truthfulness, as no apparent end could be served by its inclusion in the narrative. Although Matthew notices that the virgin birth fulfills prophecy, yet he does not state the conclusion that "therefore, Jesus is the Messiah," or some other similar apologetic statement. Naturally, Matthew's ultimate aim was to demonstrate the unique human nature of the Messiah who had been promised to the Jews, and the nature of the miracle-working Son of God who possessed all the authority of God for His actions. Matthew pictures Jesus, outside the infancy narrative, not as the Pre-existent One who deigns to dwell in human

flesh, but rather as the divinely-authorized, truly human, truly Jewish Messiah. Throughout Matthew's selection of incidents from Jesus' life, from chapter three to the end, Jesus' ethical character and authoritative doctrine are presented without the precise definitions of His supernatural Person that are seen throughout John's Gospel and in the epistles. Therefore, the infancy narratives, which announce the supernatural conception of the Son of God, are absolutely essential to providing the historical facts upon which the Jewish Messiahship and the divine incarnation must be based. Without the actual facts surrounding the virgin birth, these grand doctrines must forever be left suspended, ungrounded in verifiable history obtained from the eyewitnesses. Without the narrative of the supernatural conception, we may expect no satisfactory answer to the demand: where and when did the incarnation occur in such clear fashion as to fulfill all of the expectations of messianic prophecy? But, note carefully, the formulation and defence of these doctrines is our assimilation of the facts stated in these narratives plus other materials elsewhere; Matthew and Luke limit themselves to simple narration. This permits the doctrine to rest upon the statement of the facts. Thus, since the Evangelists were not trying to serve apologetic purposes, the historical veracity of the narration is the better guaranteed.



The virgin birth narrative is important, for it involves a clear, consistent account of the Lord's birth without which nothing sure could be known.

3. *As a matter of* INTEGRITY.

a. The honesty of all who confront the virgin birth: this fact puts to the proof, not the mental equipment of the skeptic, but his moral character. The problem before the critic is not the adequacy of the testimony, for the whole body of the early Christians attest the factuality of the virgin birth of Jesus, and the rejection of this testimony involves the radical undermining of confidence in all the testimony of the gospel witnesses. (See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, Chap. XI in which he proves that silence does not prove ignorance of it, but rather shows that the Apostles assumed it.) The denial of the miraculous conception of Jesus is not based upon well-attested history to the contrary, but rather upon the false philosophy of what can or cannot be known about God and His actions, a philosophy based upon the "accepted principles of thought of our day." This false philosophy is nothing more than a mistaken view of natural law which holds that the uniformity in nature is an exact and immutable force which governs the universe. Thus, the appearance of a virgin birth disturbs the "law of normal human birth" as conceived through scientific observation of all observable cases and drawing probable conclusions about all others. While the scientific method leads to generally certain knowledge of repeated and repeatable events, it cannot speak with authority on the virgin birth, a unique event having no parallels. The scientific method can search the historical backgrounds, certify the reliability and veracity of the witnesses, but having done so, must listen to the testimony they bring. The question of the virgin birth, then, remains, "Will we accept the testimony of the eye-witnesses and the universal acknowledgement of the early Church as recorded in the documents of the Church, or, rejecting this, will we adhere to a mistaken view of natural law, a view which decides *a priori* that all miraculous events are impossible?"

b. The honesty of God is brought into the question of the virgin birth inasmuch as He promised to bring Immanuel into the world in just this fashion (Isa. 7:14). As this Child is conceived in Mary, a young woman who is a virgin, the sure word of prophecy is fulfilled and God's promise is kept.

c. The virgin birth touches the life of Jesus at the point which separates the most degraded and the most sacred in human life: either Jesus is the illegitimate son of some man known only to Mary or the offspring of fornication or the natural son of Joseph, or else He is the virgin-born Son of God. The clear, factual reporting of the gospel record is decisive in its declaration on which choice alone from the beginning stood above suspicion and doubt. That which involves the personal history and public honor of our Lord and His family cannot be a matter of indifference. The fact cannot be over-emphasized that the entire New Testament witness stands or falls as a whole. There is no objective standard by which certain portions of Jesus' life, as recorded by the gospel writers, may be excized, which does not also destroy every basis for secure knowledge about Jesus.

For further study see encyclopedic articles, such as those in ISBE: "Person of Jesus Christ," "Virgin Birth," "Messiah." A classic work in this field is J. Gresham Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, especially chapters VII-IX, XIII.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What does the Bible teach about Mary regarding her perpetual virginity, her sinlessness, her office as mediator for Christians, and her place in the church?
2. State the importance of the virgin birth to the Christian faith. Why believe in the virgin birth?
3. Give the proof for the virgin birth as a matter of historic fact.
4. What is the relationship between the genealogy which preceded the virgin birth narrative and the narrative itself?
5. Is this birth narrative recorded by Matthew the first event immediately connected with the life of Jesus? Or, are there other important events. If so, what are they?
6. At what time during the engagement of Mary and Joseph was she found to be "with child"? What difference would the time make?
7. What was the true cause of Mary's pregnancy? What difference would it have made were it otherwise?
8. What was the punishment for marital unfaithfulness under the Mosaic law?
9. In what order did the events probably occur from the betrothal of Mary and Joseph until they were married by their "coming together"?

10. Describe Joseph's character from what may be known of it from all available information (Mt. 1:18-25; 2:13-15, 19-23; Lk. 2:4, 21-24, 39-49).
11. What courses of action were open to Joseph while he was yet ignorant of the true cause of Mary's condition?
12. List other occasions on which God had revealed His will through dreams or visions.
13. What does it mean to be a "son of David"? To Joseph? To Jesus?
14. What is the relation of the name the Babe is to wear with His ministry to the world?
15. List the objections offered to the consideration of Isa. 7:14 as referring to the virgin birth and answer them.
16. What is the significance of the title "Immanuel"?
17. Show the different facts in the case of the birth of Jesus that demonstrate the protection from slander that might have arisen from ignorant gossip.

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ONE

"THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD"

God's Faithfulness is demonstrated:

- I. IN HIS FIDELITY TO THE FATHERS. (v. 1) God had promised Abraham that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. He had sworn with an oath to David that He would set one of his descendents upon his throne forever. The genealogy of Jesus proves the marvelous fulfillment of God's promises. God can be completely trusted. Isaiah's prophecy came true in the most astounding way.
- II. IN HIS JUSTIFICATION OF JOSEPH'S JUDGMENTS.
All that is seen of Joseph reveals a guileless Israelite, especially in his decision how he would divorce Mary. It was the only righteous thing to do, yet God had other plans. Even after the vision of the angel, Joseph yet had to decide whether he would take the risk that was clearly involved and trust God to do what He had said. The obedience of Joseph (1:24, 25) is a heroic demonstration of faith. God fully justified Joseph's decision by bringing to pass what He had promised.

III. IN HIS SAVING SINNERS FROM THEIR SINS.

- A. "JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (1:21)
- B. Immanuel, God with us (1:23)

What this means:

These three demonstrations of God's trustworthiness mean something! We learn something of the character of God:

- A. God's fidelity to the fathers means that however distant may seem the fulfillment of His promises, however unlikely and visionary, God always keeps His Word. God has promised His Church many precious, glowing gifts both present and future. Though we may never live to see them personally received in our lifetime is no indication at all that they are not sure and forthcoming.
- B. God's Justification of Joseph teaches us that the doubts, fears and perplexities of His people may be turned into God's advantage and into a clear manifestation of His own glory, as well as to His people. God is therefore to be trusted even though we do not understand the reason for our doubts and frustrations. The obedience of Joseph illustrates the lesson that from the time a man is sure he has understood God's Word for his case he must dispute his doubts no more, but shut his ears to all human reasoning and obey God.
- C. God's Son's Salvation of Sinners shows two significant truths:
 - 1. God has shown us the true character of sin by presenting it in such a light that we should hate it in our own souls and cry to be saved from it. If God took on human flesh to deal personally, finally and mercifully with sinners and die for sin, then how unspeakably evil sin must be!
 - 2. God has shown us the true character of His fellowship. The great secret of our Christian joy lies in this fact that we do not believe in an absent God. Rather we serve one who is ever present ever so much more, since Jesus came as our "Immanuel, God with us."

Try to grasp what these great truths mean and then see what they do to you!

- A. They ought to make us humble. If the Son of God, King of Kings and Lord of Glory, chose to come to this earth in the lowliest manner; if He chose a manger to be born in, a working man's home in which to live, the commonest food and clothing; and if He did all this just to die for sinners so that God could deal with men through grace, then, we have no basis for pride. We have all been one of the class of moral lepers and all our best righteousness was just make-believe. (Ro. 6:21, 22)
- B. God's being ever with us to save and sustain us ought to make us brave. If God be for us and with us, who can stand against us? No temptation will ever be too strong to be conquered, no difficulty will ever be too hard to be surmounted by us who know that Jesus our Immanuel is God with us.
- C. What God has done in Christ ought to make us love men—all men—in spite of what they are. Look on your fellow-men and learn, from God's coming in the flesh, to respect man, every man, as wearing the flesh that Jesus wore.

CHAPTER TWO

Section 3

THE VISIT OF THE WISEMEN

TEXT: 2:1-12

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wisemen from the east came to Jerusalem, saying,
2. Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him.
3. And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
4. And gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born.
5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written through the prophet,
6. And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: For out of thee shall come forth a governor, Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel.
7. Then Herod privily called the Wise-men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared.
8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him.
9. And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.
10. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.
11. And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.
12. And being warned of *God* in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What interest would these Wise-men have in a Jewish king worthy of worship?

- b. Why did not Herod know where the Christ should be born?
- c. Why did the star point out a house instead of a manger?
- d. Why should the Wise-men give such gifts and reverence to an apparently quite ordinary baby?
- e. What are the important lessons to be learned from this story?
- f. What do you think was Herod's real intent behind the question as to the time of the appearing of the star?
- g. Why do you think Herod would send the Wise-men to seek the Babe, when he might have better sent an armed force?
- h. Why did the wisemen "rejoice greatly" upon seeing the star?
- i. Do you think that the scribes and chief priests could have known that Jesus had been born?

PARAPHRASE

After the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of Herod, there arrived some astrologers from the East, asking as they came to Jerusalem, "Where is the child born to be King of the Jews? For we observed His star in the East and are come to pay Him homage."

Now when King Herod heard of this he was greatly perturbed, and so, too, was all Jerusalem. So he called a meeting of all the chief priests and men of letters of the people and put before them the question, "Where is the Christ to be born?"

"At Bethlehem of Judea," was their answer, "for it stands written by the prophet Micah (5:1-3), 'And you, O Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd Israel my people.'"

Herod next called the astrologers to meet him in private, to ascertain from them the date of the star's appearance. And, sending them to Bethlehem, he commanded, "Go and make careful inquiries about the child. Whenever you have found Him, tell me, so that I myself may go and offer Him homage also."

The astrologers, when they heard what the king had to say, went their way. And the star, which they had seen in the East, went in front of them as they travelled, until at last it came and stood immediately above the place where the little Child lay. At the sight of the star they were filled with indescribable joy.

Entering into the house, they saw the little Child with Mary His mother, and falling on their knees they bowed to the ground in homage to Him. Then they unpacked their treasures and offered gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

But afterwards, having been warned of God in a dream not to return to Herod, they set out for their own country by another route.

SUMMARY

Some time after Jesus' birth, oriental sages appeared in Jerusalem asking news about Him. Frightened and suspicious, Herod sought information on the Messiah's appearance. Indicating to the sages Bethlehem as the site, Herod sent them to make his inquiry, facilitating his own plans. Instead, they found the Babe and returned home another way.

NOTES

I. THE SEARCHING SAGES

2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.

With these words Matthew locates the birth of Jesus, whereas he had not located the preceding events (the betrothal of Mary and Joseph, the annunciation to Joseph and their marriage, 1:18-25). The phrase "until she had borne a son" (1:25) is not to be construed as locating that entire series of events at Bethlehem, connecting them with "Jesus was born in Bethlehem," (2:1) for probably all that is implied in those events occurred at Nazareth (Cf. Lk. 1:26-39, 56; 2:4-6). Though the English would give the thought that "when Jesus was born . . . wise-men came from the East," yet Matthew's Greek does not link the two ideas. The Greek construction expressing Jesus' birth is a genitive absolute (a genitive participle grammatically unrelated to the sentence with which it is connected and which merely provides additional facts). It is better rendered: Jesus having been born in Bethlehem . . . behold, magi were proceeding to Jerusalem." Thus it is clear that the visit of the wise-men did not take place immediately after the birth of Jesus, a fact which harmonizes with other known facts mentioned in the narrative.

How much time had elapsed between the birth of Jesus and the visit of the magi, which ends in the flight of Joseph and Mary with Jesus into Egypt, must be learned from Luke (2:21-24; Lev. 12:2-8). Hence, at least the forty days of purification, the presentation of Jesus in the temple at Jerusalem, and a supposed return to Bethlehem, were past. Add to this the last forty days of Herod's life spent at Jericho in almost total physical incapacity, whereas the magi had found him at Jerusalem. Jesus must have been born at least eighty days before.

In the days of Herod the king. With these words Matthew both dates this chapter and introduces a character in the short but dramatic part which he will play in the life of Jesus. The "days of Herod the king," as the effective, continuous ruler of Judea, began in 37 B.C. when he obtained the crown of Judea as a satellite-king under the imperial overlordship of Rome. They ended in the spring of 4 B.C. after a rule characterized by a struggle for supremacy, by brilliant and progressive administration, by magnificent building programs and splendid improvements of existing structures, and by domestic chaos. He has been well called "a Jewish Nero" because of his personal character of jealousy for his power and a maniacal suspicion and because he bathed his own house and kingdom in blood. As he entered the scene for his brief part, he is fully in character: crafty, of an uncontrollable rage, superstitious, ruthless and bloody. Josephus called him "Herod the Great."

The Herodian line of kings, being Idumean, was only nominally Jewish due to an enforced circumcision of the Edomites (Idumeans), a "conversion by force of arms" about 125 B.C. Alexander Jannaeus, the Maccabean conqueror, appointed an Idumean, Antipater I, as governor of Idumaea. This latter's grandson, Herod the Great, quickly won Roman favor and rapid promotions. However, through his emulation of the habits and philosophy of the Gentiles, his introduction of heathen sports and temples within his realm, his robbing his own people that he might give rich gifts to curry Roman favor, and his flagrant domestic immorality, he also won the well-deserved hatred of the Jews.

Matthew's brief notice of Herod's reign affixes the date for the birth of Jesus at least four years earlier than the date usually assigned, since Herod died in 4 B.C. This mistake of four years was made by Dionysius the Small, an abbot in Rome about 526, who apparently ignored the date of Herod's death and the relation of Christ's birth to it. The four-year miscalculation could possibly be greater as the time is not known from the birth of Jesus until the death of Herod (Mt. 2:1, 15). It may be that God has deliberately left the month and day and especially the year of our Lord's birth hidden among the other unremembered facts of history in order that we might give attention and obedience to the Lord Himself rather than that we should be lost in the unessential elements of His life.

Behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem. These mysterious visitors entering the Jewish capital city with their even

more curious questions must have raised many questions: Who are they? Whence have they come? What do they want? Various answers as to their identity and country of origin have been offered, due to the appearance in history of several types of oriental philosopher-priests. The term *Magi* refers to a Persian, or also a Babylonian, wise man and priest, who was expert in astrology, interpretation of dreams and various other secret arts. (cf. Dan. 2:10, 27, 48; 4:6-9; 5:7, 11, 12) *Magi* could be used in a good sense, as in the case of Daniel, (cf. Dan. 2) or in an evil sense, as in the case of Simon (Ac. 8:9) or Elymas Barjesus (Ac. 13:6, 8). At best, these magi were skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science and probably were the possessors of what real learning existed in their period; at worst, many imposters among them were little more than fortune-tellers, sorcerers, magicians and charlatans.

From the East probably refers to the countries just east of the Euphrates River: Babylonia, Persia or Chaldea, whence many wise-men of the so-called magi priest class arose. *The East* would be the Mesopotamian valley, as viewed from Palestine and so regarded by the ancients (Gen. 29:1, 4; Num. 22:5; 23:7). The suggestion that Arabia was their home, based upon the gifts they brought, which are supposed to be Arabian in origin, is not necessary, as Arabia was neither east geographically but south, and the gifts could have been purchased by trading with Arabia.

2:2 As they were coming into Jerusalem, they were probably thinking that their question was an obvious one, which surely by that time possessed a well-known answer: **"Where is he that has been born king of the Jews?"** To this city they had come to pay Him homage, not because they imagined that He must be born in the Jewish capital but because they would naturally expect there to obtain authentic information where He might be found. Had they known the true state of affairs in the capital, especially the heart of Herod its king, perhaps they might not have asked such a politically dangerous question.

We saw his star when it rose and came to worship him. This declaration of the magi may be thought to emphasize one particular aspect of the studies of these priest-scholars: i.e. as astrologers scanning the heavens, they observed some extraordinary astronomical phenomenon and concluded from their astrological tables that a king of the Jews should be born about this time in the land of the Jews. Such a conclusion, at best, is highly doubtful, because of the extraordinarily

arbitrary guesswork that created those astrological charts in the diabolical attempt to divine the future. It is hardly likely that God, who had condemned the attempts to discern the future through study of natural phenomenon (Dt. 18:9-14; II Kgs. 17:16, 17; 23:5; Isa. 44:25; 47:13; Jer. 10:2; Ac. 7:41-43), would stamp His approval upon such pseudo-knowledge as was contained in the astrological systems. It is also a dubious conclusion that any such astrological calculation could actually lead to the true determination that a king should be born in Judea, an event which, by its nature, was unique, different from all other births. Certainly true is the conclusion that it was not astrology that led these wise-men to the Christ, but OT prophecy (Micah 5:2) coupled with the moving of the star to Bethlehem. Direct, divine revelation, given to the magi while yet in their own country to explain the meaning of the star, must not be ruled out. (See below on v. 12)

His star. The "star" described by Matthew has the following character:

1. It was seen from the East when it arose (v. 2) and then again in the west as it led the magi to the house of Joseph in Bethlehem (v. 9).
2. It was going before the wise-men; i.e. south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (v. 9), and therefore it did not continue the westward movement of normal stars.
3. It came to rest over the place where the child was (v. 9), thus apparently distinguishing it from all other houses in Bethlehem.

Obviously, these characteristics mark this sidereal appearance as something other than natural phenomenon. Unless the language adopted to describe the "star" be taken in some other way than its literal import, conjunctions of stars, comets, and the like may be rejected as the naturalistic explanation of what the magi beheld. Astronomically speaking, the narrative has been purposely left too incomplete for any simple or naturalistic conclusion to be drawn from it. One short verse could have answered all our questions but that verse was not given. The "star," whatever its physical property may have been, was of no further importance than to serve as guide to the wise-men until they found the home of Joseph where they might find the Messiah, and having found Him, they had no further need of its direction. Having accepted the extraordinary character of the Evan-

gelists' narrations as sober history containing supernatural elements, we see no serious objection to considering the "star" as a miraculous phenomenon provided by God for the specific purpose of guiding the magi. If ordinary means are not sufficient, God is able to employ the extraordinary. This consideration is fully in harmony with the supernatural appearance to Joseph (Mt. 1:20, 21), with the angel's messages to Zechariah (Lk. 1:8-20), with the appearance to Mary (Lk. 1:26-38) or with that to the shepherds (Lk. 2:8-15). Even as the children of Israel were led supernaturally by God by means of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night from Egypt to the promised land, similarly are the wise-men led by the miraculous star from the East to the Promised One.

How the magi came to know that the special "star" was of particular significance regarding the birth of "the king of the Jews," and that His station above them required their homage and made Him worthy of their gifts is not told. Nor is it possible to relate the magi's knowledge to the national messianic hopes of the Jews scattered throughout the East (Ac. 2:9), for there is no OT passage that clearly predicts the appearance of a star as the signal of the birth of the Messiah. To Balaam's prophecy (Num. 24:17) appeal is made to provide just such a passage, but is it credible that the magi could have so understood the passage to refer to the "star" they were beholding or that they understood the passage as directing them to undertake such a journey as they did to pay homage to the king of the Jews? Besides, if they were familiar with the OT prophecies, why did they not know that the Christ should be born in Bethlehem? Even though the magi themselves might have possessed a copy of the OT scriptures for personal study, no "star" prophecy can therein be found.

Regarding the so-called "world-wide expectation of a Jewish Messiah," Edersheim (*Life*, I, 203) comments:

There is no historical evidence that at the time of Christ there was among the nations any widespread expectancy of the Advent of a Messiah in Palestine. Where the knowledge of such a hope existed, it must have been entirely derived from Jewish sources. The allusions to it by *Tacitus* (Hist. v. 13; 75-125 A.D.) and *Suetonius* (Vesp. 4; 70-123 A.D.) are evidently derived from Josephus, and admittedly refer to the Flavian dynasty, and to a period seventy years or more after the Advent of Christ . . .

Since the wise-men "were warned in a dream not to return to Herod," by direct revelation from God, is it inconceivable that their concept of the meaning of the star and their undertaking this westward journey should have been directed in the same manner?

We have come to worship him. If we knew more of the mind of the magi, we might be better able to appreciate what they intended to offer the infant King of the Jews. The Greek word for "worship" is defined by Arndt-Gingrich (723) as meaning:

proskuneo; used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before a person and kissing his feet, the hem of his garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or something holy; (*fall down and*) *worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully, . . .* This reverence or worship is paid:

1. to human beings who, however, are to be recognized by this act as belonging to a supernatural realm: to a king; a slave to his master, see Mt. 18:26; Ac. 10:25, 26; Rev. 3:9.
2. To God; also used of the various divinities:
 - a. of the God worshipped by monotheists (Christians, Jews, Samaritans) . . .
 - b. of the idol-worship of polytheism (see Ac. 7:43) . . .
3. To the devil and Satanic beings (see Mt. 4:9; Lk. 4:7; Rev. 9:20; 13:4, 12, 15; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4;
4. to angels; Rev. 22:8, 9
5. to Jesus, who is revered and worshipped as Messianic King and Divine Helper: Mt. 2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 20:20; Jn. 9:38. The demons ask a favor of Him, Mk. 5:6. Mock worship on the part of soldiers, Mk. 15:19. The Risen Lord is especially the object of worship: Mt. 28:9, 17 . . .

The inquiry of the wise-men indicates their expectation that the birth of the King should have been a matter of common knowledge at least by the time they arrived at Jerusalem. What a surprise it must have been for them to find those who lived at the very center of this great event to be ignorant of it. Ignorance and unbelief are

still familiar faces among those by whom Jesus ought to be best known. The question of the wise-men may not be at all naive or politically dangerous from their view, since they came seeking what they considered to be a Babe known to all.

II. THE CRAFTY KING

2:3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled.

The wicked, suspicious heart of Herod would undoubtedly have caused him to place informers everywhere in Jerusalem. Matthew does not say whether the magi came directly to the official head of the nation with their question. He does declare that "they were coming, asking" (literally: imperfect indicative and a present participle). So probably their query outran them to the old king. God could have told them to go to Bethlehem to find the Child, but this would have left Jerusalem without announcement. Their inquiry served to stir up the whole city with the exciting news that a king had just been born in Judea. The sensational question of the magi, because it agitated Herod's suspicious nature, now became a matter of life and death to all. Thus, when Herod heard this unwelcome question, he was visibly shaken **and all Jerusalem with him**. The source of their fears differed:

1. The fear of Herod was kindled by a stubborn fact that had dogged him throughout his intrigue-filled, bloody rise to power: he was neither king nor a Jew. He ruled under the control of Rome and had won the title of "king" from his true masters. By birth he was Edomite and thus was a usurper to the throne of David. He had spent his whole life seizing and holding this throne. Now, after stifling the Maccabean princes by murder and after sacrificing the wife of his love and the children of his loins, he trembles to hear that dreaded question, "Where is he that is born the king of the Jews?" Herod instantly understood well enough that that king could only be the promised Messiah of the Jews. Such an unanticipated question coming from such an unexpected source shocked Herod deeply enough to believe the wise-men and to realize that all his previous precautions would have been in vain if he could not, by some swift stroke, slay that Child and thus secure to himself and his posterity his coveted throne.

2. The fear of the Jerusalemites cannot have been the same which animated Herod. Jerusalem knew Herod, and she shivered as she awaited Herod's inevitable reaction: the violent measures which the bloody old despot might take in quelling any rival movement. *And all Jerusalem with him* must not be construed to say that the city was devoted to her king and feared that her interests would suffer with his. Naturally, Herod had his sycophants, his political supporters, the Herodians, and those among the Jerusalemites who were dedicated to his secular philosophy. But even these latter would not be able to hide themselves from the searching beam of Herod's unreasoning suspicion. Among those who openly opposed Herod were the powerful Pharisees. As Josephus says:

"These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras' wife paid their fine for them. In order to requite which kindness of hers, since they were believed to have the foreknowledge of things to come by divine inspiration, they foretold how God had decreed that Herod's government should cease, and his posterity should be deprived of it; but that the kingdom should come to her and Pheroras, and to their children." (*Antiquities* XVII, 2, 4)

Although the Pharisees were basically wrong in their prediction and it may be supposed that Herod considered their "prophecy" as arising from wishful thinking rather than divine inspiration, yet when the influential Pharisees announced the finish of Herod's kingdom and the magi asked concerning the birth of the (new) Jewish king, Herod could not but tremble. But his fear did not block immediate, cunning decisions.

III. THE INFORMED BUT INDIFFERENT

2:4 **And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.** Though there be one "high" priest whose unique function it

was to enter the Most Holy Place once a year (Lev. 8, 9, 21) and who was particularly set apart to his office, yet there were other chiefs of the twenty-four courses into which David had divided the priests (I Chron. 24:1-19). In the time of Herod, the high priests were set up and deposed for political reasons at Herod's pleasure. The Romans did the same, changing the personnel so frequently that the position became almost an annual appointment. (Cf. Jn. 11:49; Ac. 23:1-5) Though many changes were thus made, the high priest was always chosen from certain priestly families. Thus, the plural *chief priests* probably refers to this group of deposed high priests who retained their title although not their position, or to the family of chief priests in general. The *scribes* were the learned rabbis, the professional students of the Law and experts in its exposition and renowned in teaching it. Herod's move to call together these authorities of Israel is at once marked by his usual cunning, for apparently Herod does not commit himself on the subject. Rather, to all appearances, his pretence to be devout in his attitude toward Old Testament prophecies could also serve to enhance his image. He simply placed before these scholars the question of the Messiah's birthplace. Doubtless he did so in the absence of the magi (cf. v. 7), for it would not have served his murderous designs to permit these eastern sages to compare notes with the scholars of Judaism if indeed the Messiah had been born. Observe how he who, under ordinary circumstances, would have nothing but contempt for the divine message, now becomes anxious to know its predictions so that he might render them harmless by secret measures of his own. What irony: Herod trusted the Bible's message enough to act upon it by sending the wise-men to Bethlehem according to the prophecy, but he totally ignored the all-knowing God who gave the prophecy and who would be fully capable of thwarting Herod's scheme!

The wise-men had asked for one "born king of the Jews." Herod laid before the council the demand for "the Christ." The kind of Christ expected by the Jews was a worldly "king of the Jews" who would have indeed been a true rival to Herod.

2:5 They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet . . . Herod may have already known this, as it was generally known (Jn. 7:40-52), but he required an official, authoritative declaration from the highest authority available. To Herod's demand, they could return only one answer and quote the Scripture which so declared it, Micah 5:2. This prediction of Micah was generally accepted and universally understood to point out the Messiah's

birthplace. The prompt, unequivocal answer, given by these highest authorities in Judaism, indicate three clear facts:

1. That the expected Messiah is an individual, not the Jewish nation itself;
2. That the Messiah's birth must occur at Bethlehem and nowhere else;
3. That those who reject Jesus as Messiah must reject that natural interpretation by those Jewish scholars, must re-interpret Micah, or must reject the possibility of predictive prophecy altogether.

2:6 Matthew reproduces here the prophetic utterance of Micah exactly as such quotations were popularly made at that time and with the same freedom in quoting that we use today. The fact that there are verbal differences between Matthew's reproduction of Micah 5:2 and the OT original should be no cause for alarm. If it be remembered that Hebrew was practically a dead language, at least so far as the common people were concerned, and that a translation into the popular dialect was necessitated, then it will not be surprising to hear one of the Sanhedrin or even Matthew himself give neither a literal version nor a complete paraphrase, but rather something between them which would be an interpretative translation. Ederheim (*Life*, I, 206) demonstrated the universally practiced method of so rendering the Scriptures for a popular audience.

How aptly Micah's prophecy refers to the birthplace of Christ Jesus! He pictures the future Ruler of Israel whose goings forth reach back into eternity, as springing from the insignificant Bethlehem whence had arisen David. It was well known that the Messiah should be "the Son of David" and should come from Bethlehem (Mt. 22:41-45; Jn. 7:41, 42). Not only the name of the birthplace of the Messiah is given in advance, but also the description of the condition of the Jewish nation in general and the family of David in particular. The birth of the Christ in the almost insignificant country town of David, instead of in Jerusalem, the great city of David, presupposes that the family of David would have lost the throne and fallen into poverty and obscurity. To a people who gloried in false greatness, these words must have been a stumbling-block. (Cf. the context of Micah's message.)

The famous teachers of the Law who answered Herod's question were no fools. They would not have been duped by Herod's outwardly devout attitude, nor could they have rationally supposed that

his demand concerning the birthplace of the Christ have other than sinister motives. Nor would they have been ignorant of the magi's dramatic entrance into Jerusalem. It could be safely assumed that they had basically the same information as Herod. What kept them from making their own independent investigation of these marvelous circumstances: the sudden appearance of magi seeking "him who is born king of the Jews," led by a "star," the abrupt interest of Herod in messianic prophecy. And had they not perhaps seen the strange "star" also? Yet, they were not sufficiently aroused to initiate their own private inquiry. It is impossible to know just how much these Jewish rulers had seen of the strange events, and thus to ascertain their guilt in not "turning aside to see this thing which is come to pass." (cf. Ex. 3:3, 4) Nevertheless, they have their representatives in every age, who, faced with greater light guiding them to more exciting truth, yawn and refuse to investigate and apply the will of God to their lives. Unfortunately, their great learning did not profit them, since they missed the joy surrounding the Messiah's birth.

2:7 Then Herod summoned the wise-men secretly. The less publicity that should be given the magi, the better it would be for Herod's plan. This may have been the first time that the magi actually stood before Herod. **He ascertained from them what time the star appeared.** To all appearances, Herod's interest now is merely curiosity as if prompted by innocent motives. He had learned the location of the birthplace of the Messiah and would be able to trade that knowledge with the wise-men in exchange for their knowledge of the time of the birth. Herod assumes that the time of the rising of the star coincided with either the Christ's conception or His birth, and thus he is better able to judge with what age king he must now deal. It cannot be known what answer the magi gave, for "two years old and under" (v. 16) may be an ample margin decided by Herod.

2:8 He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him. These hypocritical words, not intended for the ears of any who knew Herod, would deceive these strangers who would now suppose the same religious interests motivated the king as animated them. The plot was simple; it could not fail. The innocent dupes now become Herod's tools. But why did he not have the wise-men followed instead of trusting them to

bring back word to him after they had found the Child? Matthew is not writing a murder mystery; hence, he does not tell every detail. But who could say that Herod did not send along spies after them? If so, his attempt must have failed, as the story shows. Of course, the seeming naiveté in Herod's scheme may be merely the folly of a mad king failing in his closing years.

2:9, 10 **When they had heard the king they went their way** the six-mile journey south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. On the *star*, see on verse 2. The miraculous "star," immediately observable, coupled with the confident, supernatural prediction of the prophet Micah, worked together to produce the multiplied comfort in the hearts of the magi: **they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.** Their search had not been in vain. Though their goal had not yet been realized, they were able to rejoice in the likely prospect of its soon realization. Why they should rejoice upon their seeing the "star" is not clear: had it been invisible during their conversation with Herod due to clouds or daylight? Had it appeared once when they were yet in their homeland, causing them to undertake their journey to Jerusalem and disappearing until this moment? At least, **it came and stood over the place where was the young child.** It thus enabled them, without enquiries which could arouse the unwanted curiosity of the Bethlehemites, to find Jesus. If the magi entered Bethlehem by night, this too contributed to the privacy of their coming and, consequently, to the future safety of Jesus.

2:11 By this time, Joseph had been able to secure a suitable dwelling and move the little family from the feeding-place of the animals into a house. (Lk. 2:7) The immense crowd, that had come to Bethlehem to enroll themselves, had finished their business and returned home. The magi entered the simple quarters, provided by the carpenter, to find the object of their search: *the young child* (not a newly born baby). The marvel here described lies in the reaction of the magi: **they fell down and worshipped him!** Every worldly circumstance that usually declares the power and position of the world's great was absent. This Babe was born, not in the palaces of the capital of the empire, but in the stable of a dusty country village. Few even knew that He had been born. Here was a rented house, a lowly heritage, some simple baby clothes. But the star and the prophecy had directed them to THIS Babe and through the eyes of faith the wise-men were able to see the King in that small Child.

On *worship*, see 2:1. In the typical oriental manner, they *fell down* before Him, indicating in such gestures that they have found in Him the King they sought. Whether they *worshipped Him* as divine or merely revered Him as a Jewish prince somehow destined for greatness is not known since we are not told the extent of God's revelation to them. Their homage offered to Jesus under such circumstances is certainly a memorial to their honesty: they brought and gave the best: *gold, frankincense* (a resin used in making incense), *and myrrh* (also a resin used as one ingredient in incense, but also used as an anesthetic when mingled with wine; also used in embalming). Gold would be a natural gift, but why the others? What was this Child to do with them? Perhaps the magi had other reasons, but if their gifts are religiously inspired, they are the more readily intelligible. If these wise-men see before them a Divine King, then incense is quite appropriate. Their worship and gifts indicate forethought. What a condemnation of half-hearted worshippers who are content to give Jesus the left-over scraps of their lives! Refusing to give Him their best, they degrade themselves and bring dishonor to their King.

2:12 Again God breaks into history to give warning by a *dream* (see on 1:20). The reappearance of the "star" to guide the magi to Bethlehem and this dream both suggest that the intervening events occurred at night. Is there any over-riding reason why they should not have all occurred the same night? Even if the magi left the next morning, the whereabouts of Jesus is yet unimportant even if known. The shepherds had excited the entire village several weeks before (Lk. 2:17, 18, 20); hence, Bethlehem knew something of Jesus, but until the coming of Herod's murderers, this information did not closely touch its citizens.

How simply are the plans of the scheming Herod thwarted. The magi, arising from sleep, take the road northeast from Bethlehem to Jericho, thus avoiding the return to Jerusalem. By the time Herod realized that the magi were not to return to him, they were beyond his vindictive grasp, east of the Jordan **returning to their own country**. Thus, they disappear from Matthew's pages as suddenly and mysteriously as they entered. But by them, God has identified the Child as the universal Messianic King, not only as the hope of His ancient people, the Hebrews, but also the anticipated joy of those "afar off."

FACT QUESTIONS

1. When and why did Joseph take Mary to Bethlehem, thus providing such a background for the birth of Jesus?
2. How does Matthew date the birth of Jesus?
3. Did this visit of the magi take place immediately after the birth of Jesus? How do you know?
4. Who is "Herod the king"? Tell all you know about his reign, his character, etc.
5. Who were the "wise-men"? Whence did they come?
6. How did they know about the birth of Jesus?
7. Why did they come?
8. Answer the following objection to the account of the magi as represented in the biblical narrative: "If the magi were rightly guided by astrological calculations, and if their conception of the relation between the movements of heavenly bodies and earthly events actually led them in this case to the Christ, then God's stamp of approval is put upon a harmful pseudo-science. The magi and those who came into contact with them upon their return to the East would be confirmed in their superstition, and such confirmation of what is false is unworthy of the God of truth."
9. What was the "star" they saw? Is there any astronomical confirmation of such a "star"? List all the characteristics of the "star" as implied in the account of Matthew.
10. Is it possible to explain Matthew's description of the "star" and its movements as a figurative representation of some purely natural astronomical phenomenon? Or, in other words, is it necessary to interpret Matthew's account of the "star" literally in order to be true to his intent, granted that the objective phenomenon be regarded as having reality? On what basis do you answer thus?
11. How could the magi have known the meaning of the phenomenon?
12. Why was Herod so greatly troubled about this one "born king of the Jews"?
13. What reason had the inhabitants of Jerusalem to fear such news of a new king of the Jews?
14. To whom did Herod go for information and what did he ask?
15. The wise-men had asked about "the king of the Jews." So why did Herod ask the peculiar question he did?

16. To what prophecy did they turn in order to answer Herod?
17. What does their ready answer indicate about the meaning of the prophecy?
18. If there should be only one "high priest" (Ex. 28, 29; Lev. 4:3, 16; 21; Num. 20:28; 35:25; Ac. 22:30—23:5), how can Matthew speak of a group of "chief priests"? Who are these "chief priests"?
19. Who are the "scribes"?
20. How would you answer these attacks on the historical probability of this entire narrative:
 - a. "Would Herod have excited messianic hopes by calling such a meeting of the chief priests and scribes to ask where the Messiah was to be born? These very hopes ran counter to his every design and he could hardly have hoped to gain his purpose by arousing them."
 - b. "Would the wise-men have been so naive to ask so politically dangerous a question in such a public way under the very eyes of so suspicious a king as Herod?"
 - c. "After the scribes had pointed to Bethlehem, why would Herod have used secrecy in calling the magi to him? What possible purpose could such secrecy now serve?"
 - d. "Would Herod actually have thought the magi so naive as to suppose that he really wanted to worship a rival claimant to his throne?"
 - e. "It would have been more true to Herod's well-known character had he simply sent spies after the magi so that upon their finding the Child they could have killed him."
21. Standing in Jerusalem, how would you give directions to the wise-men to get to Bethlehem?
22. To whom did the magi offer their gifts and worship: to "the child with Mary his mother," or to the child alone?
23. In what usual ways were the various gifts brought by the magi used? Is there any significance in this when they are considered as offered to Jesus?
24. How did the wise-men know not to return to Herod as they had promised? What does this indicate about the source of their knowledge concerning the "king of the Jews" whom they came seeking?

Section 4

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT AND RETURN

TEXT: 2:13-23

13. Now when they were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I tell thee: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.
14. And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt;
15. and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt did I call my son.
16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the Wise-men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had exactly learned of the Wise-men.
17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying,
18. A voice heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she would not be comforted, because they are not.
19. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,
20. Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the young child's life.
21. And he arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.
22. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither; and being warned *of God* in a dream, he withdrew into the parts of Galilee,
23. and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What characteristics do you see in Joseph that reveal some of the reasons why God chose him to be Mary's husband and Jesus' protector?
- b. What does this incident reveal about Herod's nature?
- c. Why do you think God allowed His only Son to grow up in such a despicable little town as Nazareth? Had not the by-word said, "Can anything good come from Nazareth"?
- d. Why would God have Joseph take the family out of the country when Herod never did see the Baby and could not have identified it anyway?
- e. What does the age "two years old and under" indicate about:
 - (1) the appearing of the star to the magi in the East?
 - (2) the age of Jesus when Herod sought to slay Him?
- f. Why would God send Joseph to Egypt and not to Edom or Arabia or perhaps to Mesopotamia?
- g. Why should Joseph be afraid to return to Bethlehem, even though Herod the Great was dead as well as "those that sought the child's life"?
- h. Why should not Joseph be equally afraid of the ruler of Galilee, who was also another son of Herod the Great?
- i. Would the Bethlehemites have known the location of the house where dwelt the Babe "born to be King"?

PARAPHRASE

Now when the magi had departed, it was then that the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Get up now: you must take the little Child and His mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I direct you further. For Herod is about to search for the Child to do away with Him."

So Joseph awoke and, taking the Child and His mother by night, they made *their* escape to Egypt where they remained until Herod's death. This resulted in the fulfillment of what the Lord had declared through His prophet Hosea (11:1): "I called my Son out of Egypt."

When Herod realized that he had been trifled with by the magi, he flew into a furious rage. He issued orders for the massacre of all baby boys in Bethlehem and its whole neighboring vicinity, of the age of two years or less, corresponding to the time he had ascertained from the wise-men.

Then Jeremiah's prophecy (31:15) was fulfilled which reads:

"A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel is weeping for her children,
Refusing all consolation,
Because they are gone."

After the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared by dream to Joseph in Egypt, commanding, "Rise and take the little Child and His mother with you and make the trip back into the land of Israel. For they who sought to slay Jesus are now themselves dead!" So Joseph got up and took the little Child and His mother and journeyed toward the land of Israel. Hearing, however, that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judaea, Joseph was afraid to go there. So, having been instructed by God in a dream, he withdrew to that part of the country called Galilee where he settled down in the old hometown of former years called Nazareth. This action resulted in the fulfillment of the message of several prophets who said, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

SUMMARY

God, indicating Egypt as the place of secure refuge, warned Joseph of Herod's murderous intent. Joseph instantly obeyed by taking Jesus and Mary into Egypt. Herod carried out the massacre of the innocents and later died. Then God informed Joseph that it was safe to return to Palestine. They settled in Nazareth. The incident results in the fulfillment of two prophecies.

NOTES

2:13 The magi having left the house of Joseph, each settled down for the night. But this night was to be troubled by dreams: one which warned the wise-men not to return to Herod; another warning Joseph to save Jesus' life by flight into Egypt. It would seem that it was Joseph's plan to remain indefinitely in Bethlehem, but this was to be their last night there. To the little family this was a night of conflicting emotions: happily surprised by the adoration and offerings of the magi, they had gone to sleep only to be shaken by the angel's warning to flee. The high honors of being parents of God's Son are also accompanied by sorrow, pain and great self-sacrifice. Whatever plans Joseph had laid for the support of his family there in Bethlehem

must immediately be scrapped due to the urgent necessity of immediate flight to Egypt. Egypt's near border lay approximately 100 miles to the southwest of Bethlehem, beyond the reach of Herod. They could not travel rapidly, so all attention must have been given to immediate departure **while it was yet night**. They must escape detection at all costs, so that they could not later be followed by Herod's men.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream: see on 1:20. Joseph is the legal father of Jesus, so the care of the Child is in his hands. The one word of hope in the angel's message is the promise of a future appearance. This flight into Egypt though sudden is not unforeseen to the mind and will of God, because the magi had just delivered God's provision for the little family's sustenance in Egypt, i.e. the gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Escape to Egypt is quite reasonable, since it was the closest Roman province outside Herod's jurisdiction and was large enough to hide a peasant carpenter, his wife and Baby. Thousands of Jews had settled there. In Alexandria, the chief city of Egypt, the Jews "occupied a more influential position than anywhere else in the ancient world." (ISBE, 94a). It would not be at all difficult for Joseph to labor at his craft until the day of their return to Israel.

The full treachery of Herod is exposed: **Herod will seek the young child to destroy him**. Perhaps the wise-men had narrated to Joseph the drama of the star, their visit with Herod, and his directing them to Bethlehem. Herod knew about Bethlehem: Joseph must leave instantly.

2:14 The dream having come to Joseph while he was sleeping, upon awaking, he arouses Mary into instant action, explaining to her the urgent reason for his unexpected actions. Prompt obedience to the divine message when it becomes clearly understood, as always, is the key to physical and spiritual safety! Much as we might desire to know of that flight—its means, its duration, its exact destination, its dangers—Matthew leaves us only those details necessary to the accomplishment of a greater design than the satisfaction of curiosity: the tracing in the life of Jesus the great outlines of the Messiah clearly promised in the OT.

2:15 **The death of Herod** occurred in the spring of 4 B.C. at Jericho. From this date we have a clue to the approximate fixing of the true date of the birth of Christ. An eclipse of the moon, men-

tioned by Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVII, vi, 4), occurred on March 13 of that year just prior to Herod's death. The events which preceded March, 4 B.C., then, are:

1. The enrolment under Quirinius (Luke 2:1, 2)
2. The birth of Jesus (Mt. 1, 2; Lk. 2)
3. The purification of Mary, before the presentation of Jesus in the temple at Jerusalem, required 40 days (Lev. 12; Lk. 2:22-39a).
4. Return to Bethlehem and visit of the magi (Mt. 2:1-12)
5. Flight into Egypt (Mt. 2:13ff)
6. Death of Herod (Mt. 2:15-19), after 40 days illness at Jericho.

Therefore, the birth of Jesus occurred sometime from 80 days to three months prior to March, 4 B.C., or perhaps even earlier. The common dating for the commencement of the Christian era is four years too late.

That it might be fulfilled. See the general study connected with this chapter. The words of Hosea 11:1, when first spoken by the prophet, had only one "son of God" in view, Israel: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." But God, looking upon the people of Israel and prophesying through the lips of Hosea, saw in Israel not merely a potentially great, sacerdotal people who could be His own possession. Rather, He could see in Israel, even as He led them by the hand out of the house of bondage, that yet-unformed Israelite Who would be the Messiah. God could see in Israel what even Hosea could not have seen nor could have intended in his prophetic utterance. It was not until the return of God's true Son from Egypt that God's foreknowledge and planning could be seen. Now the thrilling news could be heralded: God brought Israel out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses not for Israel's sake, but for Jesus' sake! The obscure passage of Hosea shouts: "God knew ahead of time and carried out His plan for Israel by means of Jesus!" It is not merely coincidental that the angel sent Joseph to Egypt, and not to Babylon or elsewhere.

2:16 Herod, mocked of the wise-men. Not a word of this slaughter is found in the available secular history. Some have seized upon this fact to discredit Matthew's inclusion of such a story. No doubt, from the Christian point of view, the massacre of these little boys would be a particularly atrocious and newsworthy event. One

would think that at least Josephus would have included the story in his life of Herod. But several factors combine to explain Josephus' silence:

1. The all-too-common exposure of infants, being an almost ordinary feature of the period, might render the murder of these infants worthy of no special horror. (Unger, *Archeology and the NT*, 57)
2. Bethlehem's position was that of an obscure little village of no particular interest to the leaders of the period and the number of male children in it under two years of age would not be many;
3. Herod's closing years were painted in the blood of nobles and those of position. A few babies might not even merit attention outside the limits of Bethlehem!
4. Even if Josephus knew of the incident, he might have ignored it, since a full explanation of it would have necessitated mention of Jewish messianic hopes, which, in preparing his work for Roman readers, he might have chosen to omit.

There is no reason, therefore, to suppose that if the massacre of the Bethlehem babes had really occurred, Josephus would necessarily have included it in his history. Yet, though the tragedy is not attested by other history, it is in perfect harmony with what is known of Herod in his latter years. Matthew in no wise exaggerates the character of Herod by saying, "When Herod found that he had been trifled with by the magi was in a furious rage . . ." Although he had been an able monarch, yet in the last years of his reign his cruelty reached the verge of madness: his murdering his own children and the one wife he loved, and his plan to slaughter all the leading citizens of Jerusalem in the hippodrome, contain exactly that quality of wild and useless bloodshed which appears in Matthew's record. (See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, 238, 239) When frustrated in his diabolical cunning by the divine warning to the wise-men, Herod's uncontrollable rage, so characteristic of this outwitted man, now shows itself in murder. It is no less murder because done by the State in the name of the king. The fatal order concerned those baby boys whose parents lived in Bethlehem or worked the farms that spread out fan-like from and depended upon Bethlehem. Since it appeared that the wise-men had tricked him at least once, Herod took no further chances, giving the

order to kill all who had not yet reached their third birthday. *Two years* probably refers to the time of the rising of the "star" as seen by the magi at its first appearance. Herod connects this with the birth date of the supposed Messiah and gives his order accordingly.

2:17 See general study of prophetic fulfillment at the end of this section.

2:18 **Ramah** was a city in the tribal territory of Benjamin, located about 6 miles north of Jerusalem. (I Sam. 10:2; Gen. 35:16ff; 48:7; Josh. 18:25) The prophecy of Jeremiah (31:15) focuses our attention upon this city as the separation point where the victorious armies of Babylon took Israelitish captives into Babylon (Jer. 40:1), leaving only the poor of the land who wept. In a poignant, poetic figure, Jeremiah pictures the ancient mother rising from her tomb to weep also at the deportation of her children, as if they were being wrested from her arms forever. Matthew appropriates this inimitably beautiful image, using it to portray the suffering of the mothers in Bethlehem. Thus, the *fulfillment* is not one based upon the facts predicted, but upon the words which so aptly describe this otherwise unrelated event. Matthew might have said, "If these sadly beautiful words adequately described the sorrow of those who beheld the captives depart for Babylon, never to be seen again, how much more adequate are they to picture the first of a series of tragic martyrdoms for the sake of Him who would be Israel's Redeemer? If Rachel wept when the great promises of God seemed to be annulled by the deportation of her children into captivity, how much more could she do so due to this heart-rending disaster where the Messiah is taken to Egypt upon threat of His life and these innocents must suffer?"

2:19 Observe how simply Matthew tells his story: he mentions enough of the historic circumstance to leave his narration open to historical verification while omitting what would merely detract from the mainline emphasis of the life of Jesus. Josephus describes with considerable gruesome detail the facts surrounding the horrible death of Herod (*Antiquities*, XVII, vi, 5). With the death of the tyrant, the immediate danger to the Child ceased. Faster than a Roman courier, an angel of God relays the news of Herod's death to the Jewish carpenter down in Egypt.

2:20 **The land of Israel** is a phrase used to indicate all four of the small provinces which comprised it: Galilee, Samaria, Judea and

Perea. The first area into which Joseph would enter, returning from Egypt, is Judea. **They are dead** obviously refers primarily to Herod the Great who sought Jesus' life, although there may have been others who concurred with him or were employed by him.

2:22 The angel had only announced the death of Herod and commanded Joseph to take the family back to Palestine. He had not indicated a specific place to which Joseph was to bring them, nor had he stated who was to be Herod's successor. Upon crossing the Egyptian frontier into Judea or perhaps in conversation with some traveller recently returned from the Jerusalem area, Joseph learned the bad news: **Archelaus is reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod.** Archelaus, according to Josephus, was barbarously cruel to those Jews and Samaritans who had opposed his accession to power and had taken their quarrel with him clear to Rome, complaining of his ruthlessness to the Augustus. The news would travel rapidly of Archelaus' severe measures taken to repress a passover riot in which he killed 3000 shortly after his accession (*Ant.*, XVII, 9, 3). Thus, **Joseph was afraid to go there**, for it seemed still unsafe to return to Judea with the savage and reckless Archelaus on the throne. *There* implies Joseph's first intention to return to Judea probably to resettle in Bethlehem where they had lived since the birth of Jesus until the flight into Egypt. What could be more natural than that they should desire to bring up the Child in His ancestral home until the time of His appearing as King to Israel? It is an open question whether Joseph had heard of the slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem. Nazareth is forgotten for the moment, although they had lived there earlier. (Lk. 2:4) Matthew's first geographic notice is at Bethlehem, implying that Joseph's residence there had been interrupted only by Herod's plot, and now that that danger is past, Joseph seems determined to return there. Why?

1. Because Galilee was despised by the Judeans as the fringe area of piety due to its proximity to the great pagan commercial centers and heathen influences and environment in general.
2. It was inhabited by a mixed population whose dialect of Aramaic was marked by more frequent errors and malpronunciation than that of the Judean or Jerusalem dialects. Religiously, they tended to be less bound by traditions than Judeans. These differences fed the general rabbinic contempt for all that was Galilean. (cf. Jn. 7:52)

3. Jerusalem, on the other hand, was the center of the Jewish world, while Galilee was, religiously speaking, about as far from that center as was Rome. In Jerusalem stood the Temple and here was the vital center of Judaism. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 221ff)
4. Mary had kinfolk in the Judean area (Lk. 1:39).

And yet, should they have returned to Bethlehem, the danger would arise that they would be recognized, remembered and exposed to the wrath of the parents who had been deprived of their baby boys or else to the cruelty of Archelaus. Common prudence dictated the withdrawal from the dominion of Archelaus, and yet the courageous Joseph might have been thinking that, despite these objections, the proper home for the young Messiah would be in the ancestral home of David rather than in the half-Gentile Galilee. Clearly, a message from God was needed to indicate the proper solution to his dilemma.

The verb translated "warned" (ASV) may simply mean "to receive a divine communication or revelation" of any kind. The content of that revelation is not given, leaving to conjecture how much of Joseph's actions are in direct response to an express command. At least, he moved the little family to Nazareth of Galilee as a result of that word from God. This move demonstrates the foreknowledge and wisdom of God:

1. Because Galilee was then under the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, brother of Herod Archelaus, but who was also his competitor for the throne of Herod the Great, their father. It would not be as likely that Antipas would deliver the Child Jesus to Archelaus. (Cf. *Antiquities*, XVII, 11, 4 also 9, 4)
2. Because within just a few short years Judea was bathed in the blood and constant uncertainty of civil wars, whereas remoter Galilee was relatively spared (*Ant.*, XVII, 10), until Jesus could come to the years of His majority.

2:23 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets that he should be called a Nazarene. There is no one OT prophet who specifically promises that the Messiah shall be called "Nazarene." Matthew, using the plural "prophets", draws attention either to several prophets in particular or to the prophetic books in general or perhaps to the message of the entire Old Testament.

If Matthew has in mind several particular prophetic writings, which? Some maintain that "Nazareth" comes from the Hebrew stem *netzer*, meaning "root, sprout, shoot or branch," thus linking Jesus "of Nazareth = *Notsri*" with the famous "Branch" prophecies of Isaiah 11:1 and, by extension of the "root" idea to other Hebrew words and prophecies: 11:10 (*Shoresh*); 53:2 (*Shoresh*); Jer. 23:5 (*Tsemach*); 33:15 (*Tsemach*); Zech. 3:8; 6:12 (*Tsemach*). According to this view, Jesus would bear in popular speech the exact equivalent of one of the best-known designations of the Messiah. The difficulty with this view lies in its entire dependence upon a play on words, perhaps obvious to the Hebrew mind but not at all obvious to a Greek reader of this Gospel. Further, the extension of the idea to synonymous Hebrew roots spoils the supposed homonymity upon which the interpretation depends.

If, on the other hand, Matthew refers to the prophetic message in general or to the burden of the entire OT regarding the person and position of the Messiah, then, a specific prophecy is not needed to satisfy Matthew's description. Rather, the basic question would be: what does it mean to be called a Nazarene? A Nazarene is one who hails from Nazareth, but, as a slander, that libellous label contained, at least, the description of an insignificant town out of which nothing great or good was expected (cf. Jn. 1:45, 46), and, at most, when applied by the unbelieving Jews to Jesus and His followers, it spat out all the hate and odium possible (Ac. 24:5). Jesus' being called a "Nazarene," due to His having lived there, fulfilled the message of the prophets in this respect that He was to be despised and rejected. "Nazarene" was the label that marked the Jews' rejection of Him. This rejection was abundantly predicted (Psa. 22; Isa. 49:7; 52:13—53:12). Though Jesus was by birth and family stock a Bethlehemite (Mt. 2:1; Lk. 2:3, 4), Matthew draws attention to that circumstance which occasioned Jesus' being considered a "Nazarene," and to the fact that all was according to the foreknowledge of God.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. How did God make known His will to Joseph?
2. What were God's instructions to Joseph for the Babe's protection?
3. When did Joseph put into effect God's plan for the escape?
4. How long did the family remain in the foreign country?
5. What was apparently God's provision for the sojourn in that country?

6. Who said, "Out of Egypt did I call My Son," and where is this quotation originally located? What is meant by the original quotation as viewed in light of the second?
7. What was the reaction of Herod when his plan was frustrated? Is this what might have been expected of the man from what is known of him from other historical notices?
8. Which prophet wrote the words: "A voice was heard in Ramah . . ."? To what event did he refer? How is it possible for Matthew to cite these words with reference to the slaughter of the infants?
9. Where did Joseph apparently think of settling as he brought the family back into Palestine?
10. Who now ruled in the province of Judea? In the province of Galilee?
11. What is known of the city of Nazareth?
12. List all the facts since Jesus' birth that secured His safety during those critical months.
13. Why should Jesus be called a "Nazarene," when He was born in Bethlehem?
14. In what sense can it be said that His being called a Nazarene was predicted by the prophets? What prophets predicted this?
15. Luke 2:39 says, "And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth." But, Matthew tells this long, involved story of the wise-men, the slaughter of infants, the flight into Egypt and return to Israel, all of which must be inserted between the presentation of the Baby Jesus in the temple and return to Nazareth. How is it possible that Luke should have ignored such a thrilling story if it is true? It is possible that Matthew could have invented that gruesome story? How could both writers be telling the truth?
16. List several reasons why Josephus, our most important, secular Jewish historian, would probably not have recorded the coming of the wise-men to Herod, the excitement of Jerusalem and the slaughter of the infants, even if he had known about these events.
17. List all the miracles or apparently miraculous details that are connected with the birth of Jesus.
18. List all the names and titles applied to Jesus in these early chapters: Matthew 1:3; Mark 1; Luke 1:3; John 1.

19. List the facts and problems connected with the date of Jesus' birth. Prove as well as you can the date of His birth.
20. List all the prophecies fulfilled in the incidents connected with the early years of Jesus, as stated by Matthew.
21. Tell why the fulfillment of such prophecies is so significant to the Jews.
22. Explain how this historic fulfillment of prophecies lends support to a belief in the inspiration of the OT which contains them.
23. Discuss the childhood and youth of Jesus: tell all we know about it and what we may reasonably suppose.

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER TWO

"TREASURING THE TRUTH"

No sooner was Jesus born into this world than men began grouping themselves into three groups, into which men are always divided by the Lord. In the historic facts of this chapter we have the types of these classes which have ever demonstrated their true nature by their reaction to God's truth:

- I. **HATRED AND HOSTILITY:** those who are fearfully alarmed at the truth. Like Herod, they may seek it and yet violently hate the truth when it interferes with their plans. Others, like Herod, may know the prophecies of Christ's coming but hope they would not be fulfilled in *their* lives and time, preferring their Herods with peace to the Messiah with revolution which would disturb their lives and plans. But look at the absurdity of all their crafty counsels to overthrow the truth: if the "truth" be not at all true, they need not worry, since nothing will come of it. But if the "truth" be the very word of God, their efforts to thwart it and Him must ever be fruitless and useless! If the Child be not the Messiah, Herod need not have been alarmed; but if He be the Christ, all of Herod's best plots could never succeed.
- II. **COMPLETE INDIFFERENCE:** those who rest in the letter of the truth but do nothing about it. The scribes and Pharisees, who were called into council by Herod to answer his demand for truth, knew the right answers. But when faced by Him who arose from Bethlehem to proclaim Himself to

be the Truth, they rejected the truth. It is shocking that those who had the most knowledge regarding the coming of the truth into the world were not the ones most interested in searching for it. If they had any wish to go to Bethlehem to investigate or any inclination to surrender their worldly lust for reputation and position, it was insufficient to make them brave Herod's wrath or the scorn of their fellows.

III. ADORING WORSHIP: those who earnestly seek and affectionately guard and willingly obey the truth:

A. The Magi, at great pains and expense, had willingly followed every bit and piece of divine revelation entrusted to them.

B. Joseph and Mary were, from the very first, ever ready to lay their lives and reputations on the line, to act at a moment's notice to obey God's will by protecting and rearing Him who would be God's clearest demonstration of His truth.

CONCLUSION: Why do we seek God's truth?

1. To hate and attempt to thwart its effect in our lives when we see that it contradicts our will, our desires and our plans? Do we seek it to attempt to mold it around our ambitions? The man whose one desire is to do what he likes never has any use for Jesus Christ. The Christian is he who has ceased to do what he likes, surrendering his life to do what Jesus wills.
2. Or, do we seek God's truth in order to rest in our rigid orthodoxy and knowledge, however accurate, of the letter of the Scripture, never condescending to expend time and energy to investigate the message nor make careful application to our own lives? Are we so interested in our own affairs that Jesus Christ, frankly, does not interest us?
3. Or, are we earnestly seeking the truth as heaven's highest prize and earth's most precious reward? Do we know the meaning of instant obedience to the voice of God? Do we desire to lay our lives at the feet of Jesus, the noblest gifts we may bring?

SPECIAL STUDY:

HOW DOES MATTHEW USE THE PROPHECIES?

Under this innocent title lies a very vital question which touches not only the veracity of an apostle, but also the question of his inspiration, and, consequently, the question of inspiration in general, and the acceptability of the NT books as an authoritative, normative collection of historic documents as a basis of Christian faith. These statements are characteristic of the problems touched by this question:

1. What becomes of Matthew's supposed reliability as an eye-witness of the events he records, if he unblushingly uses as a prophecy about Jesus just any OT text which can be made verbally to fit, even though the ancient text originally had nothing to do with Matthew's material, and was never meant to have anything to do with it? If he unconscionably misappropriates texts in the revered prophets to bolster his case, perhaps he invents facts to support it as well. If an apostle be shown to be intellectually dishonest at this point, who could trust him to tell the truth about the resurrection of Jesus?
2. Perhaps the so-called "fulfillments" of prophecy are merely convenient interpretations of then present circumstances in order to support the pretences to Messiahship made by Jesus of Nazareth, who in reality had no right to that grand title and deserved to be crucified for his blasphemous assertions of Messiahship. (Cf. Lk. 4:16-29)
3. Are there more ways than one in which the word "fulfill" may be understood, so that both the veracity and inspiration of Matthew may stand, thus indicating something of the authority of an apostle's declaration that "this was done with the result that it fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet"?

A proper understanding of this third problem will help solve the other two. For, if it be possible to ascertain the intended meaning of Matthew behind the word "fulfilled" in each case of its use, it will lead to a clearer answer to the question of Matthew's use or supposed misuse of a given prophecy. In attacks upon Matthew's integrity, the assumption is generally made that he used the word "fulfilled" in an exact, fixed sense in every instance, somewhat along the lines of this definition: "The fulfillment of any prophecy must conform in every

respect to the details of the supposed prediction." But does our author so intend his word in every case? What is the evidence?

Two particular observations should be made at the outset regarding Matthew's use of the word "fulfill:"

A. *Matthew never precisely defines "fulfill" in such a way as to require a precise, literal fulfillment of a prophet's words in every case. Rather, he uses the word in its popular sense in a manner suited to each specific prophecy in question, leaving to his reader to decide in each case what is meant by the term. Had Matthew limited himself by so precise a definition as would require a point-by-point fulfillment, the reader would not have this liberty of interpretation according to the requirements of each case, and Matthew would then be chargeable with flagrant manipulation of OT texts.*

B. *It must be noted that the word "fulfill" is used in popular speech, both among the Jews and their writings as well as in modern English, to mean not only "point-by-point identification" but also the more general "realization or more complete manifestation of a design, plan or intention." To force one specific meaning arbitrarily upon Matthew's word would violate the most basic rule of interpretation of human writings: the only correct interpretation of an author is that which he intended to say by the words he used. If the author does not declare his intended meaning for specific words he uses, the only recourse is to the general use of the word among his contemporaries. The word "fulfill" is used in the Scriptures and in other writings in the following senses:*

1. A fulfillment is said to occur when a thing predicted clearly comes to pass as predicted. Or, it may be that there was a partial, literal fulfillment in the days of the prophet which leaves the remainder of the prophet's words for later fulfillment. This is the way Matthew (1:22, 23) makes use of Isaiah 7:14, since the promise of a virgin-born Son who would be called Immanuel is not at all fulfilled in Isaiah's day, although other parts of the prophecy were certainly fulfilled, as a sign to king Ahaz. Here, then, Matthew uses "fulfill" in its strictest sense. In 2:4-6, where the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is quoted by the Jewish authorities as the literally-predicted birthplace of the Christ, Matthew tacitly accepts the traditional reading of this passage with almost verbal insistence upon its strict, literal fulfillment. (cf. 2:1)

2. It is well-known that a writer sometimes speaks more than he or his age can comprehend. Should it be thought strange that God should make his prophet the partially unconscious agent for the expression of a great truth the implications of which might be hidden to the prophet himself or to his age? Depths of meaning, hidden both from the original writer or from his earlier interpreters, may be disclosed only by later historical developments. Such is the case with Matthew's treatment of the prophecy of Hosea (11:1). Hosea's words, taken at face value, amount up to the nation of Israel only. However, God's intention, voiced through Hosea's words and seen through the perspective of the history of Israel which focuses itself upon Jesus, was to bring His Son out of Egypt. From the naturalistic viewpoint, we would say that Matthew read history more accurately than all his contemporaries, since he had already seen in Jesus the fulfillment of all of Israel's prophecies. Accordingly, the personal exodus of Jesus from Egypt merely facilitated the true deduction that God, speaking through Hosea, really intended Jesus. On the other hand, speaking from the point of view that for good and sufficient reasons accepts the supernatural inspiration of Matthew, one could say that God inspired Matthew to reveal his correct interpretation of Israel's history, and thus also of Hosea's words regarding that history. Thus, Matthew is revealing the real meaning that God intended behind Hosea's words. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 215) comments:

In point of fact the ancient Synagogue *did* actually apply to the Messiah Ex. iv. 22, on which the words of Hosea are based. See the Midrash on Ps. ii. 7. The quotation is given in full in our remarks on Ps. ii. 7 in Appendix IX.

3. In describing the broken-hearted mothers of Bethlehem, Matthew (2:17, 18) chose rather to use the touchingly beautiful symbol used by Jeremiah (31:15) of the weeping Rachel. Here Matthew uses the word "fulfilled" in a clearly figurative sense, since the fulfillment was not of a prediction of the prophet, but of certain of his words due to their aptness to describe a different situation. There is no predictive element in Jeremiah's words except the promise of Israel's return from captivity, which is not used by Matthew.

Once again the voice of weeping motherhood is heard in Israel. The tender and beautiful imagery is applicable in this sense and is used with true insight, but with no intention of trying to justify a claim of prediction and fulfillment in the literal sense.

4. Frequently, the apostles speak of Jesus as not only fulfilling specific predictions but also fulfilling the very trend or message of the prophets. (See Jn. 1:45; 6:45; Ac. 3:18, 24; 10:43; 13:40; Ro. 1:2) It is in this general sense that Matthew describes Jesus in 2:23 as fulfilling the prophets by His being called a "Nazarene." Thus, Matthew uses "fulfill" literally, although the prediction to which he refers is found in no one prophet, but in the general trend of the prophets who describe the Messiah as "God's Suffering Servant." (Cf. Lk. 24:44ff)
5. There is a fifth use of prophecy and fulfillment that indicates how "fulfillment" may be intended: language is said to be fulfilled when, though it was used to express one event, it may be used to express another. Sayings, fables, parables and other such figures, drawn from a particular event, may have "fulfillment" in another event similar to the case from which they were originally taken. For example, Jesus asserts (Mt. 13:14) that in the unbelief of the people of His day the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9, 10 is fulfilled. While the words of Isaiah were not predictive, they are susceptible of repeated application or realization, because of the general principle they contain. They applied to the prophet's own day. They also apply, and in that sense are fulfilled, to Jesus' own day. By a legitimate extension of meaning, they apply to the stubborn unbelief of any age.

Therefore, we should stand as warned against a too-rigid and literal interpretation of any formula implying fulfillment. While it may certainly be intended to imply literal prediction and an equally literal fulfillment, it may also be intended to suggest nothing more than a harmony of principle. Since our author does not define which of these intentions he is using in each case, we are not at liberty to assert dogmatically a meaning that manifestly does not permit to Matthew the same liberty accorded to other writers in their use of words.

A major difficulty is seen in Matthew's use of a formula which implies fulfillment: "thus it was done to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet." This formula is his consistent expression both for a literally predicted fulfillment and a figurative, general fulfillment of some figure of speech or of a principle. However, Matthew's Gospel, directed as it was to one segment of a popular, oriental mind of his period, must not be charged with inaccuracy or misappropriation of prophetic texts by those of a critical, western mentality fond of mechanical precisions. If it be objected that Matthew's formula is a loose use of language, let it be answered that Matthew is in good company and that such an objection ignores the cultural background within which the Evangelist wrote. (Cf. Mk. 14:49; Jn. 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:32; 19:24, 28, 36)

Are the fulfillments of prophecy merely convenient interpretations of co-incidental circumstances made to support Jesus' pretensions?

"In the one point where the identification of Jesus with the Messiah by His followers can be tested most severely, they are most completely triumphant. It would be comparatively easy to invent incidents suggested by OT prophecies, and to take dignities and titles wholesale from the same source—but given all these, to find one capable of realizing and fulfilling the expectations so aroused is the chief problem. Here fabrication is impossible. And here too the NT meets and answers the challenge of truth." (ISBE, 2518b)

The anti-supernaturalist might ask, "But can it be said that the apostles, who were for the most part no scholars, could more correctly interpret the OT, better even than their own religious leaders? It is not likely that fishermen understood the prophets better than the Sanhedrin and the rabbis who gave their time to nothing but the study of the Law and the prophets." To this it may be replied, yes, but such simple men had not all the prejudices of rabbinical learning to forget as they studied under Jesus, although they admittedly had their own rabbinically-oriented prejudices. (Cf. Mt. 15:12ff; 16:5-12, 21-23) According to Jesus, almost all of the Jews had either ignored the spirit of the Law or misinterpreted the prophets (Mt. 5:17-48; 9:10-13; 11:12; 15:1-20; 22:15—23:39; Jn. 5:38-40, 46, 47; 7:19-24; 12:34), and consequently were not expecting the kind of Messiah that God actually had sent in the person of Jesus. Those fishermen and tax-collectors, who accepted Jesus' authority on the basis of His prof

of identity as the Revealer of God, were indeed better interpreters of the OT than the rabbis, because they had sat under Him who was the Author of that testament! (I Pe. 1:10-12) They had heard His expositions of those prophetic passages (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-48), and, were they to be considered from a mere naturalistic viewpoint, they would still be better qualified to interpret the Scriptures than any rabbi! But their source of authority is always Jesus. Back of the question of the authority and supernatural inspiration of the apostles always stands the more basic demand: What do you think of Jesus? If He be the Revealer of God, then, the interpretations of the OT He teaches the apostles to declare to the world are the only correct, possible interpretations. If Jesus fulfilled His promise to empower them to reveal truth as yet unknown to them, then, the apostles may be trusted when they declare with all the authority of God: "This was done with the result that it fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet."

The same Spirit which foretold through the lips of the prophet now interprets the fulfillment, using the pen of the Apostle. Are we at liberty to differ with the conclusions of an Apostle?

CHAPTER THREE

Section 5

THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Parallels: Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18)

TEXT: 3:1-12

1. And in those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, saying,
2. Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3. For this is he that was spoken of through Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight.
4. Now John himself had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his food was locusts and wild honey.
5. Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about the Jordan;
6. and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8. Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance:
9. and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
10. And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
11. I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and *in* fire:
12. whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did John locate his ministry in the wilderness? Why not go where the people live?

- b. How does this ministry of John prepare "the way of the Lord"?
- c. Why do you think John preached the way he did? Dressed the way he did?
- d. What is the difference or similarity between John's baptism and the baptism which Christ commanded His apostles to perform after the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? (Ac. 2)
- e. Why do you think John spoke so disrespectfully to the "reverend doctors of the Law"? Because he used such harsh language, is he not partly to blame for their rejection of him and consequently "the counsel of God" (Lk. 7:30), or not?
- f. Did the earthly ministry of Jesus fulfill John's predictions made in this section?
- g. What is the meaning of the following allusions:
- (1) "Make ye ready the way of the Lord; make straight paths"?
 - (2) "Offspring of vipers"?
 - (3) "The axe lies at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire"?
 - (4) "His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire"?
- h. Did John expect the people to show the genuineness of their repentance before he would baptize them, or did he expect such fruits of repentance to be seen in their lives after baptism as the natural result of their repentance?
- i. What is the demonstration in your life that you too have genuinely repented?
- j. If it be wrong for Paul to "speak evil of a ruler of the people" (Ac. 23:5; Ex. 22:28), why is it not wrong for John the Baptist to do the same? Or do circumstances alter cases? Paul's high priest was just as wicked as these Pharisees and Sadducees, and his judgment just as righteous as John's, but what makes the difference?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod Antipas being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Herod Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituræa and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, there was a man sent from God

whose name was John. He came for testimony to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The word of God came to this John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

In those days John "the baptizer" went throughout all the region about the Jordan where it flows through the wilderness of Judea, preaching an immersion of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, saying, "Repent! The kingdom of heaven has come!"

This is he of whom Malachi the prophet spoke (3:1), "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way." Also in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet (40:3ff), it says:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord: make His paths straight!

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall
be brought low,

The crooked shall be made straight,

The rough ways shall be made smooth,

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

John's clothing was a rough coat of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His food was a diet of dried locusts and wild honey. The people of Jerusalem and of all Judaea and the Jordan district flocked to him and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them and to the multitudes, "You sons of snakes! Who has stirred you to seek refuge from the coming judgment and God's wrath? Let your life prove your repentance! Show that your hearts are really changed! And do not even begin to presume that you can simply say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for God can raise up descendants from Abraham, even if He has to use these very stones to do it! Already God's axe of judgment stands ready to sever the tap root of the Jewish nation. Every individual Jew who does not bear fruit to the honor of God's mercy will serve as fuel to the honor of His justice!"

The people cried out, "What are we to do?"

He replied, "The man with two coats must share with him who has none, and anyone who has food, let him do likewise."

Among those who came to be immersed were some tax-collectors, who also inquired, "Teacher, what are we to do?"

"Exact no more than the assessment!"

Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"

"No bullying, no false accusations! Make do with your pay!"

As the people in expectation, questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he might himself be the Messiah, John spoke out, answering their expectations, "I immerse you in water for repentance. There is One who is mightier than I, who is coming after me. I am neither fit to unfasten nor carry His sandals. Yes, I have submerged you in water; but he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit and fire! It is His ministry which will prove the worth of the people. He will separate those of real worth to Him from the worthless: He will take the former home with Him but destroy the others as by inextinguishable fire."

So, exhorting with many other words, he preached good news to the people.

SUMMARY

The prophetically promised precursor of the Christ, John the Baptist, preached repentance, confession of sin, baptism for the remission of sins, in view of the coming Messiah's kingdom. Thundering God's judgment upon an unrepentant nation, he promised the glories of the messianic kingdom to those who prepared their hearts for the Christ's arrival.

NOTES

I. THE MISSION OF THE MAN

3:1 **In those days.** See PARAPHRASE/HARMONY for Luke's precise statement as to what days are meant. Some have mistakenly regarded Matthew as supposing by these words that John's ministry began during the time contemporaneous with the events narrated in his second chapter immediately preceding this. By this expression Matthew does not mean the return to Nazareth, which took place about 28 years before, although he could refer to the whole time Jesus dwelt at Nazareth, and may well indicate "in that age" or "in that era," thus contrasting the era when John began his ministry with the later period when Matthew wrote his Gospel. Therefore, according to Luke's notations, John came preaching in the period from 26-29 A.D.

The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (14-37 A.D.) alone, is 29 A.D., or 26 A.D. if Luke is reckoning from his co-regency with Augustus. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from 26-36 A.D. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee from 4 B.C. to 34 A.D. The high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, counting the actual influence of Annas after he was deposed until the end of the high-priesthood of Caiaphas, lasted from 6 to 36 A.D.

John the Baptist. Beyond this text may be known the following facts about him:

1. He was born under most unusual circumstances (Lk. 1:5-25, 57-80).
2. He was kin to Jesus (Lk. 1:36).
3. His message and baptism possessed the full divine authority (Mt. 21:25, 26, 32; Mk. 11:30-32; Lk. 3:2; 7:29, 30; Jn. 1:6), although his baptism possessed temporary validity (Ac. 18:24-26; 19:1-7).
4. John came to bear witness to the Christ, introducing Him to the Jewish nation (Jn. 1:6-8, 15, 19-36; 5:33-36).
5. He also baptized in Aenon near Salim (Jn. 3:23).
6. He and his disciples fasted (Mt. 9:14; 11:18; Mk. 2:18; Lk. 7:33).
7. He taught his disciples to pray (Lk. 11:1).
8. John was completely self-effacing (Jn. 3:25-30).
9. He was the great "Elijah" promised (Mal. 4:5; Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Lk. 1:17), who was to come to turn many of the children of Israel unto the Lord their God.
10. He was the last of the greatest prophets (Mt. 11:11, 13). The common people wondered if he might not be the Messiah (Lk. 3:15). They were sure he was a prophet (Lk. 20:6), although he performed no miracle. What he said about Jesus came to pass (Jn. 10:40, 41). He disclaimed any pretense to the Messiahship (Ac. 13:24, 25).
11. He was imprisoned and beheaded by Herod for his preaching (Mt. 4:12; 11:2-4; 14:2-10; Mk. 6:14-25). While in prison,

he wondered how Jesus was going to fulfill his (John's) predictions (Lk. 7:19-24).

12. Some of his disciples were Apollos (Ac. 18:24-26) and 12 others at Ephesus (Ac. 19:1-7), certainly Andrew (Jn. 1:40) and perhaps Simon Peter (Jn. 1:41-42). "The other disciple" or John the Evangelist (Jn. 1:37-40) and his "own" brother, James, are supposed by some to be also the Baptist's disciples. Maybe also were Philip and Nathanael (Jn. 1:43-49) because of their proximity to John's baptism when in reality they were Galileans of Bethsaida. Were Joseph Justus Barsabbas and Matthias also his disciples? (Cf. Ac. 1:21-23)

John the Baptist came preaching. The fact that he was called "the Baptizer" indicates the uniqueness of his work. Had there been other "baptists" or even "baptisms" on the scale or for the purposes practiced by John, it is assumed that he would not have been thus labelled. Though there were many washings under the Mosaic Law (Heb. 9:10; Lev. 14:9; 15; 16:28; Num. 19:7, 19), these were self-baptisms and were not required as an indication of personal commitment to the immediate advent of the Messiah. (See Ac. 19:1-4) Any comparison of the practice of John with the baptism of proselytes must reckon with the divine origin of John's baptism as contrasted to the doubtful origins of the other. (See Edersheim, *Life*, I, 273) Again, John is called "the Baptist" and not "John the Essene," apparently because his contemporaries could mark a clear distinction between this intensely evangelistic preacher who appealed to the entire Jewish nation to repent and prepare themselves for the immediate appearance of the Messiah by a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as contrasted with exclusive sect of Qumranites, the Essenes, who manifested no such discernible program of missionary activity, and who apparently knew of no personal Messiah immediately to appear.

Other evidences that John the Baptist was no Essene:

1. His food and dress were not Essenic. While he ate "locusts," the Essenes abstained from animal food (Edersheim, *Life*, Vol. I, p. 264, Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber*). Usually, the public dress of the Essenes, which became almost their insignia, was a white linen garment (ISBE, 1000, citing Hyppolytus, *Refutations*).
2. The Essene doctrine of God's absolute preordination of every-

thing would logically deny John's doctrine of personal responsibility.

3. John was intensely missionary and evangelistic in the proclamation of his messianic message, whereas the Qumranites (if they may be identified with the Essenes) had no discernible message or program for winning new adherents except by adopting the children of others to train in their ways. John's concern was national, while Essenic concern was self-development (at the expense of national revival) which never brought its adherents to real, outgoing love for their fellow Jews.
4. John actually prepared the way for the Messiah, whereas the members of the Qumran community, despite their messianic fervor and piety, never apparently recognized the Messiah when He came, insofar as their relationship to Jesus is known.
5. Although the messages of the Essenes and John are both apocalyptic in their messianic hopes, the predictions of the Essenes are general and visionary, hence, not truly prophetic, whereas John's predictions were specific and immediately verified in the coming of the Messiah.

(See ISBE article, p. 997f; Unger, *Archeology and the NT*, 88ff.)

In the wilderness of Judea. This barren region of rugged gorges and desolate badlands extended along the western side of the Dead Sea to approximately five miles north of the sea up the Jordan Valley. It is located in the eastern part of Judah where the land plunges into that valley and is usually arid, thus inhabitable, except by some wild life. (Cf. Mk. 1:13) The Jordan River flows past the northern end of this wilderness before entering the Dead Sea. It was probably at the point where the eastern trade route crossed the Jordan that John began his preaching, for the location afforded an audience among the travellers compelled to pause at the ford, and it afforded a place suitable for baptizing. Evidently, John did not remain here exclusively (cf. Jn. 10:40), because later he was baptizing "in Bethany beyond the Jordan" (Jn. 1:28) and still later "at Aenon near Salim" (Jn. 3:23). Luke specifically declares that John made his message known "in all the region round about the Jordan." (3:3)

This wild country not only formed the background for John's preaching, but undoubtedly wrought the steel which was his character: His life-long habitual home in the desert (Lk. 1:80). He was away

from the luxuries, the comforts of society and the outward prosperity but corrupted morals. This must have prepared John in such a manner as to equip him to leap fully matured upon the stage of human events and call the nation to repent. He would need to have been thoroughly tested and proven before he would face a people indifferent to religion and a religious leadership outwardly orthodox but really corrupt.

By the calculations of men (cf. Jn. 7:3, 4) the wilderness would seem a strangely inappropriate, barren field of labor, as there were no great cities where men could be reached with so important a message. However, it was an ideal location for the very fact that it was away from the distractions of city life, and, at the same time, close to water for baptism. John was such a preacher that once he had fired the interest and imagination of the first few contacted with a message of the Messiah soon to appear, the news raced throughout the surrounding region and the people came to him!

3:2 Repent! The first word from God uttered in nearly 400 years brings clearly into focus all that would restore that perfect fellowship with God, which was lost since the first sin. It strikes the keynote for the entire kingdom of God. None may enter this kingdom with his baggage of personal, willful sins, nor under his own terms. Repentance is that unconditional surrender to the will of God that lays down the arms of self-righteousness and self-justification and asks, "What must I do to accept the terms of pardon?" This demand of God that men repent possesses tremendous power for the transformation of the race. It clearly demands the renunciation of any and all cherished sins, for they ruptured fellowship with God from the very beginning and have continued to do so ever since. This command to repent cannot be substituted by claims of righteousness, or refused on the grounds of lineage, nor evaded by hiding among the masses who also do not wish to change their lives. It is personal, born of convictions; God would change men by teaching them to change their convictions. Jesus and John preached and appealed to these convictions to induce Israel to repent:

1. The conviction of God's authority over the sinner and of His perfect righteousness (cf. Ro. 2:1-16; Ezra 9:13, 15; Ps. 51:4b; Dan. 9:4, 7a);
2. The conviction of one's own guilt (cf. II Co. 5:21; Ro. 3:10-23; Ezra 9:6b, 7, 15; Ps. 32:5; 51:1-17; Prov. 28:13; Dan. 9:5-13);

3. A conviction of the fear of the Lord based upon what is known of His purity and our own iniquity. A man who never trembles in fear of his sin and God's punishment will never repent (cf. Lk. 13:3, 5; Ezra 9:14; Prov. 19:23; 14:27; 15:33; 16:6; Dan. 9:13);
4. A sense of shame regarding the manner of life lived out of connection and harmony with the character and will of God (cf. Ro. 6:21; Jer. 3:3; 8:12; Ezra 9:6; Dan. 9:7);
5. The certainty of the goodness, love and mercy of God (Ro. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9, 13; Psa. 103: all, but esp. vv. 3, 10). God has even granted man the opportunity to repent! (Ac. 5:31; 11:18; Heb. 12:17; Dan. 9:9);
6. The certain conviction of the reality of those precious treasures which God promises to those willing to surrender all to Him. If the changing of human nature is the changing of the desires of that nature, then, the changing power of repentance is in the desiring of different desires. There is purifying power in hope (II Pet. 1:3-11; I Jn. 3:1-3) which forces out of the picture all that does not agree with that new affection. If a man is obsessed with a great desire, or a great idea, such as that which God offers in the Kingdom of Christ, there are not enough obstacles to stop him from obtaining them!

The full process of repentance involves the complete change of the man (Ac. 26:18; II Co. 7:8-11)

The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. This is the positive, exciting reason for John's stern demand of the nation: not a mere negative rejection of certain past sins or even a habit of sinfulness, but rather a positive preparation for the sudden appearance of the King and the commencement of His rule. But what sort of kingdom will it be? It will be the long-awaited rule of God in the hearts of men empowered by their effective repentance. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 265) sums up the nature and importance of this central theme of John's preaching:

Concerning this 'Kingdom of Heaven,' which was the great message of John, and the great work of Christ Himself, we may here say, that it is the whole Old Testament *sublimated*, and the whole New Testament *realised*. The idea of it did not lie hidden in the Old, to be opened up in the New

Testament—as did the mystery of its realization. But this rule of heaven and Kingship of Jehovah was the very substance of the Old Testament; the object of the calling and mission of Israel; the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; the underlying idea of all its institutions. It explained alike the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the Old Testament could not be understood; it gave perpetuity to its teaching, and dignity to its representations. This constituted alike the real contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity, and Israel's real title to distinction. Thus the whole Old Testament was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the Kingship of its Lord.

Study this concept as expressed in law, prophecy, and popular devotion: Ex. 19:6; I Sam. 12:12; II Sam. 7:8-16; Psa. 2:6; 5:2; 10:16; 22:28; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:4; 45:6, 7; 47; 48:1, 2; 74:12; 84:3; 95:3; 98:6; 145:1, 11-13; Isa. 9:6, 7; 33:17-22; 37:16; 43:15; Jer. 10:6-10; 30:9; Dan. 2:44; 7:9-28; Zech. 14:9, 16, 17. John's hearers believed in God, at least formally, and were acquainted with God's revelations in the OT, but a people indifferent to its obligations to God under that revelation are certainly not prepared to receive additional revelation. They must repent before they can believe the gospel! Instead of calling the nation to military exercises to prepare for the restoration of national glory, a call which would have been perfectly in accord with the common expectation, John challenged Israel to a personal, immediate and drastic change of life, their conduct and their hopes.

3:3 **This is he.** John the Baptist is the God-sent fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, not merely history repeated: there is no other "voice." (Jn. 1:23; also Mk. 1:2; Mt. 11:10)

In the wilderness. Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, II, 141), following the parallelism in the Hebrew, construes this phrase, not with the crier, but as the place where the preparation was to be made for the Messiah's coming. Luke (3:5) gives the full quotation of this prophecy (Isa. 40:3ff), defining the heart of Israel as a spiritual wilderness containing hindrances and obstacles which would impede the progress of the kingdom of God in its forward advance. Sin and impenitence had raised mountains of obstruction; only repentance could

open the road to the Lord. God means that Israel is to prepare herself so that God who is coming to deliver shall find her in such a spiritual state as befits His glory and plan. John would need to encourage the down-cast, humiliate the self-righteous and self-secure, unmask the dishonest and reduce the unapproachably haughty into submission. The very reason for John's coming to prepare Israel was the all-too-obvious fact that Israel was not ready. Note in this connection the messages of all the prophets. With one accord, they all declare that there was hardly any period when Israel was "ready for the coming of her God." No study could be more fruitful than that of Malachi, the last voice of the OT, as he points to the specific instances in which Israel had need of thorough correction by repentance.

The way of the Lord. It is Jehovah for whose coming John must awaken the nation, not merely an angelic emanation of deity, if Isaiah's prophecy (ch. 40) is to be taken seriously. Malachi (2:17—4:6) also declares unequivocally that it is Jehovah whom Israel sought and would soon see come suddenly to His temple.

(The "angel of the covenant" is Jehovah, as is demanded both by the parallelism in Mal. 3:1 and the complaint of Israel in Mal. 2:17, as well as Israel's understanding of this "messenger:" Ex. 3:2, 4, 6, 14, 15; 13:21, 22; 14:19; 23:20-23; 33:14; Deut. 4:37; Isa. 63:9)

The longing cry of Isaiah (64:1), "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!" and the sobbed prayer, "How long, O Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself forever?" (Psa. 89:46), as well as the hypocritical taunt "Where is the God of justice?" (Mal. 2:17) are about to be answered by the personal appearance of Jehovah of hosts.

II. THE MAN'S MANNER

3:4 Everything John was, spoke so eloquently that everyone could hear clearly what he was saying! It was only the message that mattered to John and he subordinated everything to its propagation. Obviously a man of self-denial, he was a living illustration of how little man really needs for existence. Dried **locusts** were a "clean" food (Lev. 11:22) and were apparently as abundant as **honey** (Ex. 3:8, 17; Deut. 8:7-9; cf. Lk. 24:42). His mode of life was somewhat similar to that of the Nazarite (Lk. 1:15; cf. Num. 6:1-23); his dress typical of the ancient prophets (II Kgs. 1:8; Zech. 13:4). His appearance reenforced his preaching: he challenged all who made food and

drink, house and clothes their chief concern in life, to turn from such vanity and concern themselves with far more essential problems. Note carefully that John did not call them to asceticism, but to repentance. He did not offer his dress and diet as the norm of piety. Doubtless, even then as today, there were many ascetics who would offer their asceticism as their excuse for not repenting! John did not demand that those who had food and raiment should leave that (Lk. 3:11), or that those in particular occupations should cease those functions within the society (Lk. 3:12-14). He called the nation to leave its SIN.

Every movement for righteousness finds its scoffers standing on the sidelines, even this one (Mt. 11:18). However, Jesus had nothing but praise for John (Mt. 11:7-15).

III. THE MAN'S MESSAGE OF MORALITY

3:5, 6 **Then went out . . . and were baptized.** The two Greek verbs (*exeporeueto* and *ebaptizonto*: imperfect tense) vividly describe the constant flow of people who kept going out to hear John and were being baptized by him. **Unto him:** but what were they going out to see? Did they seek some novel spectacle? Did they find a fickle man, easily moved by popular opinion, or rather a molder of that opinion? Did they seek some one who pampered his body with rich foods and soft clothing? Even a great prophet? What was it that moved them to such repentance, such confession of sins and baptism? They were brought face-to-face with the greatest man who ever lived, the very herald of God and precursor of the Messiah! They were faced with their sins, both national and personal, the imminent judgment of God, and the sudden coming of the Christ. The message and the man were bound up in one indissoluble unity and they could see it. They could discern no way of escape from repentance without rejecting the counsel of God against themselves. (Cf. Mt. 11:2-19; Lk. 7:18-30) **All Judea, all the region** are common hyperboles meaning "many" or perhaps "most of the people of these regions came," as we say "everybody was there" when we actually mean that the major part of the populace came (Mt. 21:23-25; Lk. 7:30).

They were baptized, i.e., they were immersed in the Jordan, for that is the meaning of the word *baptizein* and all its cognates. There exists no linguistic evidence from the first century for any other meaning assigned to this word, other than "dip, submerge, plunge or overwhelm." On this point, see ISBE, articles on "Baptism" by Lutheran, Baptist and Pede-baptist authors, p. 385ff, which throw into

sharp contrast the speculation about the supposed meaning of the word when used to support their doctrines, as over against the simplicity and unity of meaning found in the Greek lexicons which must describe the word as it was actually used in the first century.

Confessing their sins. Whether the penitents confessed particular sins to John or their sinfulness in general is not so much the point as that they did confess sins they had kept hidden for years and had cherished as a way of life. The fear of God's wrath and their lack of preparation for the coming of the Messiah laid bare their sins and devastated their excuses. For heart-touching examples of such confessions, see Neh. 1:4-11; 9:2, 3; Ezra 9:5—10-1; Dan. 9:3-20; cf. Jas. 5:16; Ac. 19:8-19, esp. 18.

3:7 When he saw many. Though Luke (3:7) describes these words as addressed to the entire crowd, Matthew here is specifying what part of the crowd was thus addressed. However, any of the crowd who would tend to agree with the sentiments of the religious leaders are thus deprived of refuge against the command of John to repent personally.

The *Pharisees* were a Jewish religio-political party which laid extreme importance upon the strictest outward observance of the law and its traditional interpretations by the rabbis. Being gross legalists, they were self-righteous hypocrites, cultivating a hollow, ostentatious formalism. (Cf. Josephus *Antiquities*, XIII, 5, 9; 10:5; XVIII, 1, 3; Lk. 18:9; 12; Mt. 23; Ac. 23:8) The *Sadducees* rejected the rabbinical traditions as well as the doctrine of the resurrection, of angels, spirits, immortality and the judgment to come. They included in their number many of the richest and most influential Jews, such as the high priests' family. (Cf. *Ant.*, XVIII, 1, 4; *Wars*, II, 8, 14; Mt. 16:1-12; 22:23; Ac. 4:1; 5:17; 23:8)

Coming to his baptism (*epi to baptisma*). This English phrase does not convey the two possibilities which the Greek phrase offers: (1) The Pharisees and Sadducees were coming *to* or *toward* the vicinity where John was baptizing. In this case, they are pictured as merely being present to judge for themselves the nature of John's ministry, criticize where they might, or perhaps to seize control of the movement if possible, lest they lose their influence with the people. John's words that are addressed to them, in this case, would be taken as ironic, because they would have denied the necessity of their repentance or need for baptism. They rejected John's baptism (Mt. 21:25; Lk. 7:30), because of their dependence upon physical rela-

tion to Abraham. John may, then, be paraphrased thus: "You vipers' offspring (a metaphor true to fact), who prompted you to flee from the coming wrath (an ironic metaphor, contrary to fact, meaning: "Surely YOU are not fleeing from the coming wrath too? No!") (2) *epi to baptisma* may also mean that they were coming for the purpose of baptism. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 289) Thus, they were coming "to have themselves baptized." Compare the parallel in Luke 3:7 (*ekporeuменois baptisthenai hup'autou*). But why were they really coming?

Could it be that these Pharisees and Sadducees, being human, felt the weariness of their outward formalistic observances from which any semblance of reality and holiness had long since departed? Did they too have sorrows, aches and spiritual unrest that accused them of their own spiritual emptiness? Were they thus led to sigh and search for something real and nourishing? Could it be that they knew that formalism and sterile morality cannot satisfy man's conscience? Or that infidelity raises only doubts and cannot rest a troubled heart? If so, John knew that they needed to be shaken hard and brought beyond that point of hidden convictions masquerading under the guise of religious respectability. They were experts in the art of dodging repentance, but this time there was to be no dodging! But, lest we feel too secure, let us remember Hebrews 2:3.

Undoubtedly, they did not all feel their need. John immediately unmasks their insincerity and impenitence and challenges their fitness for baptism. The general situation may explain their real motivation: since the new movement had attained such proportions, they may have feared the loss of their leadership of the people, if they did not join it and attempt to seize the control of the movement. They could not really be fleeing from the coming wrath if they did not believe that THEY were in danger of it. Probably they merely pretended to fear God's judgment, as a cover for their real intent.

Offspring of vipers was a title justly deserved by the Jewish rulers inasmuch as they poisoned the religious principles of the nation and crucified God's Son. (Study also Gen. 3:1-15; Rev. 12:9, 14, 15; Mt. 12:34; 23:33; Jn. 8:44)

Who warned you? Who indeed but the father of lies could have prompted these hypocrites to believe they could actually escape the wrath of God by mere outwardly religious, hypocritical acts? Were they really so blind to fail to see that their manner of life could only run more directly into the path of that which they sought to escape?

Baptized hundreds of times, they would never be able to escape the wrath of God!

The **wrath of God** is no figure of speech, no mere expression attributing to God human emotions. It is the clear, necessary reaction of God's holy, righteous character, reacting to man's sin which is the persistent rejection of His love and mercy. (Cf. Zeph. 1:14-18; 2:2, 3; Mal. 3:2-18; 4:1, 5; Mt. 23:33; Lk. 21:20-24, esp. 23b; Jn. 3:36; Ro. 1:18ff; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Th. 1:10)

3:8 **Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance!** John is saying, "Do not bring to this movement of true repentance toward God that cunning hypocrisy for which you are well known! Do not merely profess to be repenting, but show that you mean it by forsaking your sins! Do not make this trip to the water but another sinful act of hypocrisy!" These Pharisees and Sadducees could not remain what they were: they too must repent without deception or evasion, and be prepared to face all the consequences that arise out of such a dramatic change. There are some "fruits" that are unworthy of the profession to repent: a passing regret, a few tears, an excuse or two, a wish to be different, a brief outward betterment, perhaps even a resolve to change that becomes forgotten with the passage of time. Others "pay their tithes," pray regularly, support religion in a flurry of "busy-ness" but they are unwilling to admit that they are trying to evade that death to self which is true repentance. Others dare to use all manner of other devices merely to justify themselves as they are and to keep them from doing their one duty to repent!

But the *fruits* that God seeks are the various acts which show a changed heart. Repentance must issue in a real change of life that no longer presumes upon the grace and mercy of God. Even if it is not always possible for men to recognize the truly repentant, God always does (Cf. Mt. 7:15-20 with Ac. 1:24; Rev. 2:23). True repentance is inward but it must affect all the issues of life. Luke (3:10-14) describes how this preaching cut into the conscience of the common people too, making them cry out, desiring to know specifically what they must do to manifest the genuineness of their repentance. John demands that the selfish person, or those who had been indifferent to the needs of others, should show their repentance by practical deeds of compassion and mercy. Those who had been guilty of crooked dealing by extortion should show their repentance by honest dealing. Those in the military should shun sins common to

soldiers; the greedy and overbearing must produce contentment and gentle courtesy. If we would produce such fruit (Acts 26:10 means us!) we must:

1. *Confess our sin*, for true repentance necessitates the humility to admit that we have sinned. (See Prov. 28:13; Psa. 32:5, 6; 51; Jer. 2:35; 3:13)
2. *Repair the damage of our sin* whereinsofar it can be done. (Cf. Num. 5:6, 7) Sadly, this is not always possible, for these Pharisees and Sadducees had taught others to disregard God's will (Cf. Mt. 5:19, 20; 15:1-20; 23), but they could not know how far their own former evil influence had reached, and thus could not repair all the damage wrought by their teaching.
3. *Refuse to repeat* any sin under any circumstance.

3:9 **Think not to say.** Probably very few Jews were not inclined to cherish secretly the reminder of their relationship to Abraham and all of the consequent blessings that that relationship was supposed to confer. Even those who were trying to live righteously in that age must have regarded John's statement as absolutely incredible, for to all of Judaism, Abraham was unique. (Cf. Jn. 8:30-59; Lk. 16:19-31) According to their view, his meritorious goodness and favor with God not only sufficed for himself, but was such a treasury of merit that all the claims and needs of his descendents could not exhaust! And yet, their pride in their Abrahamic lineage was all the more inexcusable, since they had been clearly warned by the prophets that theirs was not an exclusive relationship irrespective of their sins. They could by no means escape punishment for their sins. (Cf. Isa. 48:1, 2; Jer. 8:8; 7:3, 4, 8-10; Micah 3:11)

John's prophetic task was to turn "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6; cf. Lk. 1:17). The "fathers" are those illustrious ancestors of the Israelite nation, the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and generally the pious forefathers such as David and the godly men of his time. (Cf. Jer. 15:1; Ezek. 14:14, 20) The "children" are their degenerate descendents of Malachi's own time and the succeeding ages. "Turning the heart of the fathers to the sons" does not mean merely directing the love of the fathers to the sons once more, but also restoring the heart of the fathers in the sons, or giving to the sons the father's disposition and affections. Then will the heart of the sons

also return to the faith of their fathers, so that they will be like-minded with their pious fathers. (Keil on *Malachi*, 472) In making their claim to the lineage of Abraham, these Jews were thinking wrongly about their father. They supposed that fleshly ties automatically carried with them all spiritual benefits and material blessings.

But John could have also said as well: "Do not think to plead special treatment by God on the basis of your genius, rank, beauty, wealth, power or splendid service to the nation! Divorced from your real character, they count for absolutely nothing in the supreme matter of eternal destiny. In fact, they may actually impede your entrance into the kingdom, inasmuch as they might hide from your very eyes your need to repent." Abraham's real children are those who express Abraham's faith and obedience to God's will. (Gal. 3:6, 7, 9, 26-29)

These stones. Does John mean by this expression, taken as a figure of speech, to indicate the Gentiles or perhaps the lower-class Jews who, in the eyes of the Pharisees and Sadducees, could make no claims to arrive at their "superior righteousness and rights to God's blessings"? Or does he mean literal stones, to show that the vital relation to Abraham, which counts with God, is not that which is based upon fleshly ties, but upon a real, inward character? Plummer (*Luke*, 90) notes: "It was God who made Abraham to be the rock whence the Jews were hewn (Isa. 51:1, 2); and out of the most unpromising material He can make genuine children of Abraham (Ro. 4; 9:6, 7; 11:13-24; Gal. 4:21-31)."

This passage may explain the stumbling-block in the mind of Nicodemus (cf. Jn. 3:3-9), for even personal self-righteousness, acquired position and blood-descent from Abraham would not avail for entrance into the Kingdom of God. Only a complete re-birth could accomplish this. (For other Christian teaching against trust in human relationships or relation by physical descent for salvation and blessing, see Jn. 1:12, 13; 3:3; 8:31-58; Mt. 8:11, 12; Lk. 16:24; Phil. 3:2-21; Col. 3:11.)

3:10 Even now the axe lies. Judgment is fast approaching! But, some would ask, is fear a proper religious motive? Yes, for God addresses His message to every sentiment of the human heart that "by all means He might save some." If love and grace do not reach the heart, the threat and terror of judgment must be given opportunity to try to stir the conscience. Even the threat of judgment on God's part demonstrates His long-suffering love and mercy. The conscience is one of God's gifts, and he who destroys it must answer for it.

The figure of the tree is clear: the trees represent the Jewish nation as a whole; every tree stands for each individual; the axe, God's judgment. The trees designated for felling have already been selected on the basis of failure to produce fruit worthy of God's continued grace. **The axe lies at the root:** the coming judgment will be complete and will involve the entire stand of trees. **The fire** is the punitive judgment of God. (Cf. Mal. 4:1; Jn. 15:6; Mt. 13:40; 18:8, 9; Tit. 3:14)

These predictions of judgment are revealed by inspiration of God to John for publication. However, John's personal interpretation of these prophecies was that Jesus would begin this fiery separation and judgment immediately upon the commencement of His ministry. Moreover, this might have seemed to John to be the meaning of Malachi 3:1, 2. However, this interpretation overly constricts the time element that lies between the Messiah's coming and His execution of world judgment. This mistaken interpretation by John later troubled him since Jesus was seemingly not fulfilling the prophecy of John as he thought He should. (See Mt. 11:2-6)

IV. THE MAN'S MASTER—THE MESSIAH

3:11 **I baptize you with water unto repentance.** On the phrase "with water" or "in water," see below on "in the Holy Spirit." The problem in John's words is to discover what is meant by "baptism UNTO repentance," for it would seem at first glance that John's baptism led to, or resulted in, repentance. However, the tenor of the whole passage seems to be just the reverse: John presumably refused to baptize any who did not demonstrate the genuineness of their repentance, although this cannot be clearly proven. On the other hand, he might have baptized all comers, while challenging the conscience of all, lest they mock the serious import of the baptism by reducing it to another act of sham religion. In this case, he would be leaving the decision to be baptized clearly up to each conscience and he proceeded to baptize all comers upon their confession of need, on the assumption that few hypocrites would risk exposure. The problem is not simply linguistic here, because the Greek preposition *eis*, usually translated in the figurative sense: "to, toward, so as to, in order to, for the purpose that, etc.," (as, for example, II Co. 7:9, 10; Ro. 10:10; 2:4; Mt. 26:28), seems to indicate that their repentance was the goal which John sought to accomplish by baptizing the people. Now, John preached a baptism that conferred the inestimable

blessing of remission of sins upon the truly repentant (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3) in order to cause the people to repent so as to be fit candidates for his baptism and its resulting forgiveness of sins. Therefore, it was not the baptism which John held before the people as the premium most desirable, so much as it was the remission of sins connected with it. Thus, the desire to obtain their soul's deep need of forgiveness would prompt the people to see their prior need to repent.

If it be true that the immediate goal of John's baptism was to cause the people to repent so that God could forgive them, was there no other purpose in John's ministry, other than calls to individual repentance in view of the coming Messiah? Or was he not also thus admitting those thus baptized to that group of repentant Israelites who, by bringing forth fruits worthy of their penitence, thus prepared themselves for the Kingdom of God and thus identified themselves with the soon-to-appear Messiah?

He who comes after me. "The coming one" (*ho erchomenos*) may have become a stereotyped phrase for "the expected Messiah." (Cf. Psa. 118:26 as cited in Mt. 21:9; 23:39; then, Hab. 2:3 as cited in Heb. 10:37; cf. Mal. 3:1; Jn. 1:15; 3:31; 6:14; 11:27; Ac. 19:4) In these NT passages, the above-cited Greek phrase appears with little modification, although it must be admitted that, in these same passages, the phrase may appertain to the wording of the sentences merely as the way in which each author wished to express himself without particular attempt to record a fixed phrase. However, Arndt-Gingrich (article: *erchomai*) cite more evidence that indicates that the Christ is meant. Again, there is particular point in John's anguished question, "Are you the coming one (*ho erchomenos*) or do we await another?" (Mt. 11:3)

The above-mentioned problem becomes important when it is observed how John seems to avoid directly using the word "Messiah," and uses instead a seemingly innocent circumlocution, "the coming One." "Messiah" was a term loaded with explosive, political implications in the Jewish mind. John never did call Jesus "the Christ," although he attributed to Him every other title of deity which leads to the same conclusion. Thus, he reduced the stimulus to merely excited nationalists and, at the same time, improved the understanding of his hearers.

He is mightier than I. Here, as later before the Jerusalem investigating committee (Jn. 1:19-27), John disclaims all pretenses to Messiahship. His stirring challenge to righteousness, call to re-

pentance, his good news of the approaching kingdom, and his threat of judgment to come, left the impression that he was the Messiah himself (Lk. 3:15). The necessity to clarify his own position led John to frame that memorable figure of the slave unworthy of his glorious Master. But it is no mere figure, for it is exactly what John felt! (cf. Jn. 3:27-30)

Feel the contrast: **I indeed . . . but he . . .** John is saying, "If you think that my small ministry has been great, if you suppose me to be the great Elijah or the promised prophet or even the Christ Himself, you have not seen anything yet! My baptism is in water leading you to repentance, but His shall be in the Holy Spirit!"

In the Holy Spirit. The long-awaited time when God's promised Spirit would come is about to arrive. (Cf. Ezek. 36:26—37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28f; Isa. 44:3) God kept His word (Ac. 1:5; 2:1-4; 10:44-48; 11:16) when His people were truly overwhelmed or submerged or immersed in God's Spirit.

Arguments based upon the presence or absence of the Greek preposition *en* here and in the parallel passages fail to establish their point, since Mark does not use it at all (1:8), while Matthew uses it in both phrases (3:11) and Luke uses it with the Holy Spirit (3:15), but not with water. The simple locative case, without the preposition *en* may still express the element in which the baptism takes place, be it water or the Holy Spirit. Or if the case be construed as instrumental, it expresses the instrument or thing with which the baptism is effected. The addition of *en* may express either the place *in* which, or the instrument *with* which the baptisms were to be effected. Whether the baptisms here mentioned are effected by immersion must be solved on other considerations than the use of *en*, "in, with." However, the Greek lexicons are clear on the meaning of the action involved in *baptize* and *baptism*.

But not only the joyful moment for the fulfillment of God's promise of the Holy Spirit, but also the "great and terrible day of the Lord" was drawing near in which God would come personally bringing judgment upon the house of Israel. (Cf. Mal. 3:1—4:6)

He shall baptize you . . . (in or with) fire. Various explanations of this "fire" are suggested:

1. That the "fiery" tongues at Pentecost are meant is improbable, since no fire ever appeared in connection with the coming of the Spirit on that day. (See Ac. 2:1-3)
2. Others suggest that only one baptism is meant under two terms: the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the kindling, illuminating and purifying which He brings into the life of the believer. (Cf. Mal. 3:2, 3) This suggestion is offered on the strength of the argument that the same persons will receive the Holy Spirit and the fire ("He will baptize YOU"). However, there is another "you" in verse 11, exactly parallel to this one, which cannot be taken in a specific sense, but must be taken only generally. It was not true that John was baptizing everyone with water, since the religious leaders rejected his baptism. Neither would it be true that Jesus should baptize indiscriminately everyone with the Holy Spirit and fire, for He will certainly separate the "you" (plural) into individuals.
3. Others suggest the fiery trials which Jesus' followers must undergo (Cf. Mk. 10:38, 39; Lk. 12:49, 50), although it may be doubted that John intended such trials as one of the glories of the Messianic Reign, which were to be contrasted with his own unworthy ministry.
4. Two baptisms are distinguished: the penitent with the Spirit, and the impenitent with penal fire. It should be noted that one of the features of OT prophecy is that it views great, widely-separated features of God's redemption and final judgment in small contexts without apparent regard to the great time intervals existing between them. John, like the old prophets, is seeing the future without the perspective of time. Thus, while the baptism of the Spirit occurred on Pentecost and on one other significant occasion thereafter, (Ac. 10:44ff; 11:15-17) the real baptism of fire is left until the end of the age. (Rev. 20:15; 21:8). Contextual limitations determine the meaning of this "fire:" the separation of good from bad both precedes and follows this verse and may be regarded as in John's mind as he mentions the blessings of the Holy Spirit upon the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked in this intervening verse.

3:12 **Whose fan.** Here John changes his figure of speech from the Mighty One who will baptize, to the Great Harvester. The picture is that of an ancient threshing floor which is a hard, level surface 40-80 feet in diameter. The grain, straw and all, was laid on its surface just as it was brought from the grainfields. After the grain was trodden out on the floor by oxen, it was then winnowed, or, separated from the chaff, by tossing the straw and grain repeatedly into the air with a large wooden shovel called "the fan." The wind blew the light chaff and dust to one side while the good heavy grain fell back onto the threshing floor. After two or three winnowings, the grain was washed, dried and passed through a sieve, and finally stored in granaries. The useless dusty chaff left over after the winnowing process was then burned.

John's meaning is simple and clear: the *threshing floor* stands for the world with its mixed population of saints and sinners. The great, final judgment, to be executed by Christ Himself, will demonstrate the true nature of every man whether he be *wheat* or *chaff*, all of which is seen in the *thorough cleaning of the threshing floor* by the farmer. Then, at the end, there will be the salvation of the righteous, represented by the *gathering of the wheat into the garner*, and the punishment of the wicked, by the *burning up of the chaff*. (Cf. Mt. 13:30, 36-43)

The idea that any mere man could be in a position to execute these judgments is unthinkable. Therefore, the deity of the Messiah stands directly behind these words which describe His power and right of judgment. And yet, the judgment is not all in His hands. When men are confronted with the Christ, they are faced with an unavoidable choice: they must either be for or against Him, accept Him or reject Him. It is precisely this choice that settles their destiny. The righteous are separated from the unrighteous by their reaction to Jesus.

Unquenchable fire. The figure of speech, taken from the threshing floor, is too limited to tell all the necessary truth, so John adds a word that seems to be contradictory in the nature of the case, but is quite clear in revealing a punishment beyond present human knowledge and experience. God is able to provide a fire that could not be extinguished for eternity, even if all the fire we have ever seen be extinguishable. Therefore, speculations as to the nature of such inextinguishable fire are valueless; those who experience it will have no doubt as to its nature or reality. (Cf. Isa. 5:24; 66:24;

Jer. 7:20; Zeph. 1:14-18; Mt. 25:41; Mk. 9:43) Other passages which teach this same final separation and effectively deny the popular doctrines of universalism ("God is too loving, too good-hearted to damn anyone"), ultimate restoration ("God will somehow purge the wicked of their sins, purifying them for ultimate salvation."), and total annihilation ("God will finally end their torment by utterly destroying the wicked."), are the following: II Th. 1:8-12; Mk. 9:48; Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:41; II Pet. 3:7-11.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Tell all you can about John the Baptist: his father, mother, birth, naming, youth, qualifications, manner of life, message, length of ministry, places of service, testimony to Jesus, prophecies about him, his similarity to the Essenes, the origin and nature of his baptism, and its relation to Christian baptism.
2. Since Matthew concluded his second chapter with the return of Jesus to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, how could Matthew initiate his next section of Jesus' life by saying "in those days"? Are we to understand that John began his ministry while Jesus was yet a child? What other information helps us to correctly interpret Matthew's introductory phrase "in those days"?
3. Why is John called "the Baptist"? What does this appellation suggest about his unique ministry?
4. Give specific directions how to find the wilderness where John preached and describe its general nature. Locate the general scene of his baptizing.
5. What was the central theme of John's preaching?
6. What was the basic purpose for John's coming to preach the special message he brought? What was John to accomplish?
7. Who was "the Lord" (Isa. 40:3) for whom John prepared?
8. Why was not Israel ready for the Messiah's coming?
9. What does the word "repent" or "repentance" mean? How is John's baptism a "baptism unto repentance"?
10. What prophetic passages were brought to fulfillment in the message and ministry of John the Baptist?
11. What blessing did the response to the message of John bring upon those who were baptized?
12. How far-reaching was John's influence with the Jewish people?
13. Why did the multitudes respond so readily to John's preaching?

14. What response did John seek among the religious leaders of the day?
15. What religious parties sent representatives to hear John? Who were these parties (what did they officially believe)?
16. Why did John address the religious leaders with such a fearful warning?
17. What is "the wrath to come"? How could they flee from it?
18. What are "fruits worthy of repentance"?
19. What does John mean by bringing up Abraham? In what connection did he mention Abraham?
20. What is the terrible danger in claiming relationship to spiritual, God-fearing ancestors, that was inherent in the way that the religious leaders were implied as reasoning?
21. How does the figure of the axe and the trees correct this mistaken mode of reasoning?
22. What promise did John make regarding the coming of Jesus, and what is meant by the various terms of that promise? (What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? When did it take place? Where? Upon whom? What is the baptism in fire? When did it take place? Where? Upon whom?)
23. Explain the figure of winnowing grain literally, and then show what use John made of the figure.
24. John was born of the tribe of Levi, dressed like the great, ancient prophets, preached a message of righteousness and repentance, but presented no supernatural credentials, such as miracles (Jn. 10:40, 41), and died before His predictions about Jesus could be verified. How could it be clear, then, to the religious leaders and multitudes alike, that he had the authority of God to thunder such a fiery message, initiate such a baptism, and make such exciting predictions about the coming of the Kingdom of God and the "One mightier than I"? Were not the learned doctors of the law justified in responding to Jesus' question regarding John's baptism, "We do not know whether his baptism is from heaven or from men," (Mt. 21:25-27), and were they not justified in not believing him (Mt. 21:32)?
25. What does the apostle Paul say about John and his ministry?
26. What is the judgment of Jesus upon John, as to his ministry, his personal greatness and his effectiveness?
27. How could so many people, as are indicated by the Evangelists' report of John's success, be free to come to hear John? Did not any of them work?

28. What is the relationship between the "forgiveness or remission of sins," enjoyed by those who accepted John's baptism, and that secured by Jesus' death on the cross? (Cf. Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3 with Heb. 9:22, 14, 15; Eph. 1:7) How could John's baptism be "for remission of sins"?
29. Were those who became disciples of John, thus preparing themselves for the commencement of the Kingdom, exempt from the sacrifices and service connected with the old Mosaic system?

Section 6

JESUS IS BAPTIZED BY JOHN

(Parallels: Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22; cf. John 1:29-34)

TEXT: 3:13-17

13. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.
14. But John would have hindered him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?
15. But Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.
16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him;
17. and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Jesus really needed to be immersed by John? If so, why? If not, why not?
- b. Why did John consider himself in need of immersion by Jesus, instead of Jesus having need of John's baptism?
- c. What do these phrases mean:
 - (1) "it becometh us"?
 - (2) "to fulfill all righteousness"?
 - (3) "he suffered him"?
- d. Why did God speak from heaven in this manner and on this particular occasion?
- e. What does Matthew mean by "the heavens were opened unto him"?

- f. How do you think Jesus reacted psychologically to that voice of His Father speaking to Him on this occasion?
- g. For what acts or attitudes of Jesus do you think God was expressing His pleasure in Jesus?
- h. Did anyone else hear the voice of God on this occasion as He identified Jesus as His Son? What of the multitudes who were constantly coming and going?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

In those days that marked the height of John's revival of the nation, which was about the thirtieth year of Jesus' life, Jesus walked from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan to John to be immersed by him. But John tried to dissuade Him, saying, "I need you to baptize ME, and YOU come to me?" But Jesus replied, "Let it be so for the present, for we do well to conform in this way with all that God requires. This is the fitting way for both of us to do our full duty to God." Then John yielded and consented to immerse Jesus.

Now when the greater part of the people had been immersed, Jesus also was baptized. He immediately went up out of the water and was praying when, suddenly, the heavens opened. They, that is at least John and Jesus, saw the Spirit of God in a bodily form descending, as does a dove, upon Him and remaining. Then there came a voice from heaven which said, "You are my dearly loved Son: I am pleased and proud of you!"

NOTES

I. A PREPARED PERSON

3:13 **Jesus came from Galilee.** Mark specifies Nazareth as the beginning point of this 60-70 mile trip on foot to that stretch of the Jordan which flows through the wilderness of Judea about 5 miles north of the Dead Sea. Nazareth, for Jesus, meant home, the quiet life, rewarding toil and memories. All this is left behind for the stormy turbulence that shall be His short, busy career. However, He who leaves home to enter the service of God is no stripling of twelve years but a mature man who has learned the joys of honest labor, the worries of a household, and the fluctuations of business with all its headaches. Yes, here is a man who chooses not to remain hidden in a small Galilean hamlet, but rather to seize eagerly His responsibility as God's Son. As He turns His back upon the relatively

easy life and sets His face to go to the inevitable cross, in effect, He is praying, "Father, it was not with sacrifices, as offerings for sin, that you were pleased. But you have prepared for me a body, and in this body I have come to do your will." (Cf. Heb. 10:5-10)

II. A PERPLEXED PROTEST

3:14 If John did not know Jesus as the Messiah (Jn. 1:31, 33), then why did he object to Jesus' request for immersion? His baptism was "for repentance" (3:11) and "for remission of sins" (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3) and yet he obviously felt that Jesus did not need his baptism. Four reasons are suggested why he might have thus demurred:

1. The *family* reason. If the intimacy of John's and Jesus' families was maintained over the years, John would have known the pure life of Jesus, his kinsman (Lk. 1:36-56, 80), through contacts at least at the great feasts in Jerusalem. However, unless Jesus were known by John to be absolutely sinless, He would have needed John's baptism, at least, in John's opinion.
2. The *inspired* reason. God's prophet that he was, John must have been able to recognize the sinlessness of Jesus by prophetic insight, just as Elisha recognized the greed and falseness of Gehazi, or the treachery and cruelty of Hazeel (II Kgs. 5:26; 8:7-15; see also Lk. 7:39). However, until the Spirit descended upon Him, John had not that divine assurance that Jesus was the Messiah nor could he say with absolute certainty, "This is the Christ," however sure he himself may have felt that He was. Of this one thing John was sure: here before him stood the cleanest, purest, godliest man his eyes had ever looked upon!
3. The *ethical* reason. He stood in the presence of Him "the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose." As John had faced the Pharisees and Sadducees, he had accorded them the very opposite treatment (3:7-10), refusing to immerse them because of their sinful impenitence. He hesitates to baptize Jesus because of His known purity.
 - a. John, by confessing his need of Jesus' baptism, thus confessed his own sin. Or was he thinking of Jesus' administration of the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

- b. By acknowledging Jesus' right to baptize even him whom God had appointed as a divinely-sent prophet, John was placing Jesus far above himself. Perhaps he suspected Him also to be the Messiah.
4. The *personal* reason. In his perplexity, John shows his personal ignorance of God's will for Jesus and of what really constitutes God's idea of a Messiah. Although John knew he was unworthy to baptize Him and thus shows his deep, reverent humility, he was on the verge of forgetting his own commission to introduce the Christ, of neglecting the express command of God, and of overlooking that very sign which had been given him by which to recognize the Messiah (Jn. 1:33). Although John was wrong in his understanding, yet his actions ring true psychologically, and, as a matter of fact, had not the narrative included his hesitation, the baptism of Jesus, recorded without any other comment, would seem to compromise His sinlessness.

Maybe all or parts of these reasons caused John to take the position he did. Yet, this misunderstanding and suggestion both provide one more temptation to Jesus, a test similar to the sorrow of His parents when He should have been expected to about His Father's affairs. Even as then, He refused to be turned aside from His divine calling and position, overcoming by relying upon perfect obedience to God.

III. A PARAMOUNT AND PERVADING PRINCIPLE

3:15 **Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.**

1. The problem: The question has puzzled the Church for centuries, just as it raised problems for John the Baptist that day: why did Jesus come to be baptized? Jesus did not intimate that John was correct in suggesting that He did not need to be baptized, but why? Several answers have been suggested:

- a. That Jesus, by His baptism, identifying Himself with the search of men for God, in order that He might reveal God to them in this their hour of new sin-consciousness? Certainly, one reason He began His ministry at this time was the timeliness of the hour in which the Jews were facing the reality of their sins as never before in immediately preceding centuries. But, could not Jesus have identified with them in other ways, or have begun His ministry without being baptized?

- b. Or, is Jesus, in this act of identification with those who truly need forgiveness and repentance, signifying that He is now ready to take upon Himself the responsibility of being their redeemer? Is He indicating that, though He be pure and yet steps into the same position shared by such sinners, He is therefore God's Lamb?
- c. Others suggest that Jesus came for His formal, solemn setting apart to His office as the Messiah and Redeemer of Israel. It is true that one of the main purposes of John's appointment was to introduce the Messiah to the world (Jn. 1:31). Further, it was proper that Jesus should have been set apart by His own forerunner, and that definite connection be shown with his ministry, as fulfilling its predictions and carrying forward its initiatives.
- d. *Permit it now* indicates that, in the case of Jesus' baptism, there was to be another purpose. While Jesus did not need the results obtained in the case of the others, i.e. transformation of life and forgiveness of sins, yet He needed another result: the perfect fulfillment of all the Father's will. Could He have gone on in His sinlessness as heretofore and have remained sinless to the end if at this point He did not do everything God had commanded? No, perfect holiness involves doing all God says to do, without rationalizing. Had Jesus refused or neglected to obey this precept of God, He would have failed, coming short of perfect righteousness.

2. His personal Purpose: "It becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus had to be immersed! There could be no doubt or hesitation for Him, once the all-important question as to the origin of John's baptism was answered: "The baptism of John, whence is it? from heaven or men?" (Mt. 21:25) Jesus submitted, not with any ulterior motive, but because John's baptism was from God. He refused to expect of others what He Himself had not undergone. Had He not so completely done God's will, His condemnation of the religious leaders (Mt. 21:25) would have had a hollow ring to it. This is why the Pharisees and Sadducees are so guilty: even if they were too self-deceived to see their need of repentance and forgiveness, at least they should have humbly submitted to be baptized by John "to fulfill all righteousness!" But, as it was, they doubly "rejected the counsel of God against themselves" (Lk. 7:30).

It must be remembered that the main element in repentance is the POSITIVE turning of the individual towards God with new determination to conform to His will, and not only the NEGATIVE turning away from sin as enmity toward God. While forsaking sin and seeking forgiveness therefrom may be the first step in repentance toward God, a step not needed by the sinless Jesus, yet positive conformity to God's righteousness was most certainly required of Jesus. Thus, it becomes most intelligible and quite proper that Jesus should feel personally impelled to submit to John's immersion. He publicly declared thereby His resolve to surrender His will to the will of God, and His renunciation of all sin. He did this, not in spite of His Sonship, but on account of it! He knew that He was the pure Son of God, but this was good reason for obeying God: as a pure Son. This purpose, personally felt by Jesus, will empower Him to face each assault of Satan, to remain humble before the applause of the multitudes, to remain calm before the confusion and misunderstandings of the disciples, to continue to love those most unlovely, and to lay down His scourged, hurting body upon the cross for our sins.

3. Our perpetual pattern. Out of that perfect union of Jesus' personal purpose with the paramount principle comes a perpetual pattern for us. Jesus was not baptized to give us an example that we should also be baptized. Rather, Jesus was baptized to give us an example of doing whatever God has commanded just because God had said to do it. If God commands US to be baptized, then we do that because He commanded and not because Jesus was baptized. In this case, we pour ourselves into Jesus' mold of perfect obedience to the Father in whatever He commands by doing just what God has specifically commanded us.

Nobody will ever formulate a better ethic than "doing all that God tells us to do." There is no better. Without God's revelation, men have such trashy ideals, and yet the whole human race descended from people who knew God (Ro. 1:18-32). Thus, all the wickedness of the world is due to departure from the knowledge of the will of God and willing obedience to it. Man cannot throw away or ignore what he knew of God's will and then expect to find a sure foundation for an ethic to take its place. In the case before us, John had preached God's will but many religious people rejected that message. Jesus could not. To please God, according to Jesus, is not to set aside anything God has commanded. In making no exception of Himself,

Jesus is saying that no excuse is good enough for not doing everything God requires. This is the true measure of *all righteousness*. (See Mt. 5:17)

John could not know of the authority of God possessed by Jesus, at least at that moment when he refused to baptize Him, so clearly as we can see from our vantage point. Thus he is not so culpable for this refusal. But, having been assured of Jesus' right to command, we must see that to argue with Jesus about the propriety of ANYTHING He requests, is sin!

4. The permission: *Then he permitted him*. Here John proves himself to be a true prophet by recognizing and obeying his true Master when that Master corrects his understanding. Jesus of Nazareth is not only far holier than John; He is also far wiser in the application of God's will. This is what John confesses in permitting Jesus to be baptized.

IV. THE PROMISED POWER

3:16 **When Jesus was baptized, he went up from the water.** Mark had specified that Jesus came to be baptized into (*eis*) the Jordan; hence, it is quite natural to assume that the phrase, *from the water*, is the logical movement of a person who had been in it. Though Matthew says "from" (*apo*), again it is Mark who is more specific: "out of" (*ek*). The prepositions by themselves are not sufficient to establish the conclusion that Jesus was immersed, but when they accord perfectly with the meaning of *baptizein*, "immerse," they become important circumstantial evidence to support that conclusion.

The heavens were opened to him. We are not told what was visible when the heavens were suddenly opened, nor even what constitutes such an opening in the heavens. From the physical nature of the heavens, as we know them, it may be said that the heavens are already open as far as the eyes of one standing at the Jordan River could see, and probably always have been. Therefore, perhaps what Matthew means is that to the physical, fleshly eyes of John and Jesus, at least, the normally invisible but thoroughly real spirit-world was made visible in a manner similar to the visions of that world seen by Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1), Stephen (Ac. 7:56), Peter (Ac. 10:11), or John (Rev. 4:1). Note also Jesus' cryptic statement (Jn. 1:51). Matthew focuses all attention upon Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, leaving the heavenly vision undescribed.

unto him . . . he saw. The "unto him" may or may not have been written by Matthew, as it has good manuscript authority both for and against it. (See SQE, p. 26) This phrase and the expression, "he saw," do not necessarily preclude all others from having seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus, and they must not be construed to exclude John. No doubt the Spirit was visible and the voice of God audible to all present. Some have understood Luke (3:21) to suggest that only Jesus and John now stood on the Jordan's bank, as the others would have left immediately after their baptism. However, that passage must be only a general statement concerning the major part of the crowds, since John also baptized others later (Jn. 3:23). Nor would it necessarily follow that they would have immediately departed after being baptized; rather, it is to be supposed that many remained to become regular "disciples of John." Thus, there were probably others still present.

descending as a dove. It may not be too important a problem to ask whether there really was a bird in the air that day. All four Gospels unite (cf. Jn. 1:32) in using this expression "as a dove" (*hos*, or *hosei peristeran*) with a common verb for descent (*katabaino*). Is it necessary to picture a real dove in this scene, any more than real fire on Pentecost (Ac. 2:3: "as fire," *hosei puros*)? Granted, there was a bodily form of some sort, but was it "dove-form," or did it merely "descend as a dove descends and lights upon" something? The fact that Luke places "in a bodily form" between "Holy Spirit" and "as a dove," does not settle the question, since, grammatically, it could stand anywhere in the sentence. The other Gospels make the phrase, "as a dove," modify either "descend" (Matthew and John) or "Holy Spirit" (Mark). Other commentaries seek for the meaning behind the symbol of the dove. If there were no bird, why bother? Mark (1:10) clarifies: "The Spirit as a dove came down into (*eis*) Him." How could a bird "enter" Jesus? But the Spirit of God in a bodily form could descend upon Jesus, even as swiftly and gracefully as a dove descends and lights, and enter into Jesus. Were there a real bird, the problem of "disposal of the body" arises just as this scene closes. Did the "bird" die right there? Disappear? Fly away? This is stretching a non-existent detail to its logical extreme. The all-important point is the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus.

The Spirit of God descending. Here is Jesus' promised power (Isa. 11:1ff) Jesus emerged from His baptism as the Messiah, designated, qualified and proclaimed so by God Himself. In this capacity He received the fullness of the Spirit for His work. (Cf. Ps. 45:7 with Heb. 1:9; Isa. 61:1 with Lk. 4:18) In His human nature which He had assumed in order to bring about our redemption, He received the Spirit (Jn. 3:34). As God, He needed nothing. It was only as the God-Man, or God in human flesh, that He needed such a gift of power as the Holy Spirit, and particularly so now, as He was ready to begin that great work for which He had come. This anointing by the Spirit does not mean that Jesus was not pure and holy before, or that He was not aware of His divine mission previously, or that He was not possessed of divine wisdom before this, for He was all this before His baptism. The coming of the Spirit performed these all-important functions:

1. The divine authentication of His identity: HE, and no other, is God's Son and Messiah;
2. His public anointing as God's Messiah (Ac. 10:38);
3. The reinforcement of the human nature of Jesus for the great work and suffering which He must shortly commence.

From this point on, we see Jesus led and empowered by the Holy Spirit as never before (Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:12; Lk. 4:1, 14, 21; Mt. 12:18f; Lk. 10:21; Heb. 9:14; Ro. 1:4; 8:11).

V. PATERNAL PLEASURE

3:17 This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. The silence of God is broken! No word from God had been heard since He spoke from heaven to Israel at Sinai. How significant that He should choose this moment to communicate directly with earth! And He shall speak again at Jesus' moment of glory (Mt. 17; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35), and shortly before His hour of suffering (Jn. 12:28-30). Here is the word of Him who cannot lie, which proclaims who Jesus really is: "*my Son!*" On this point, what other witness in the universe would be so well-qualified to testify as the Father Himself? What other fact so worthy the honor of His personal sanction as this?

God's solemn declaration of Jesus as His Son meant the fulfillment of the great Davidic promise (Ps. 2:7; cf. Heb. 1:5; 5:5). God did not need to say, "This is my chosen Messiah," for every Jew

should have known that to declare Jesus as His Son was to declare Him the Messiah.

On this point, compare Mt. 26:63-66; Mk. 14:61-64; Lk. 22:66-71; note also Jn. 10:29-33 and the line of reasoning used by the Jews in their attacks upon Jesus. Compare Psa. 2 with the standard rabbinical interpretations of it, as noted by Edersheim, *Life*, II, 716: See also Heb. 1:5; II Sam. 7:14; Psa. 89:26, 27.

The verbal difference between the reporting of the voice of God, as quoted by Matthew and the quotation by Mark and Luke should be noted. Different attempts have been made to harmonize or explain the difference. One ancient suggestion, that made by the "Ebionite Gospel" (SQE, 27), represents God as speaking twice: once to Jesus, the other to John. There is no necessary contradiction between the differing Gospel accounts. God probably spoke only once, His words being recorded loosely by Matthew as they might have been quoted by John the Baptist, while Mark and Luke cite the words directly. In either case, the message is unchanged.

But it is not just to the world in general that God addresses Himself, but to Jesus: "You are my dearly beloved Son: I am pleased and proud of you!" How gratefully comforted the human heart of Jesus must have been to hear how perfectly "on course" He was sailing through that sea which is the human life. How much joy it must have brought Him to hear God recognize Him as His unique Son, and express His paternal pleasure for His public declaration of filial obedience to the Father's will.

Though the words of God seem to be a direct quotation of Ps. 2:7a, and quite possibly His words would call to the minds of any Jew present that particular Psalm, yet it is not necessary to assume that God was either merely quoting Scripture (as if the Gospel writers had put the words in God's mouth) or that God had in mind the second half of that verse: "This day have I begotten thee." The "Ebionite Gospel" cites these latter words at this point, as if they were actually pronounced upon this occasion, in the attempt to establish the Ebionite doctrine that God adopted the human Jesus on the day of His baptism. It has been the temptation of not a few heretic sects to assume that the nature of God came upon and entered to take control of the human nature of Jesus that day. But to prove this "adoptionist doctrine," they must ignore all of the relevant facts

related to Mary by the angel (Lk. 1:26-38), or those explanations given to Joseph (Mt. 1:18-23) regarding the true nature of the yet-unborn Baby, as well as the self-awareness of Jesus at age twelve (Lk. 2:49). "This day" (Ps. 2:7) is to be understood as referring to Jesus' resurrection also, not merely to His baptism, if at all (Ac. 13:33; cf. Ro. 1:4). Further, the words of God, in the second phrase, "*my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased,*" more closely parallel Isa. 42:1 with the slight change from "servant" to "Son." To feel the force of this prophecy, it should be read in the Greek of Mt. 12:18. The point is this: by what He says, God is not making or constituting Jesus as His Son; rather, He is declaring publicly what was already true from the moment of Jesus' conception in the virgin mother. An identity card and a special anointing do not change the nature of the Person, although they verify or guarantee the nature of the relationship thus declared. By His anointing with the Holy Spirit and by the Father's proclaiming His Sonship, Jesus is thus revealed to the nation and the world as fully equipped and duly authorized to accomplish that for which He had come to earth.

Here at the baptism of Jesus, we have one of the clearest and most complete revelations of the three Persons who make up the Deity: the Son of God standing incarnate upon earth, the Spirit descending out of heaven, and the Father speaking from heaven. Again, our obedience to the divine will brings together those mighty names in connection with our baptism (Mt. 28:19).

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where did Jesus' baptism occur?
2. About how far did Jesus have to walk to get there?
3. When did it occur? That is, at what time in Jesus' life, and then, in relation to His ministry, when did it occur?
4. Why was Jesus baptized? List at least three reasons given in the Scriptures.
5. Why did John hesitate to baptize Jesus?
6. Cite any evidence that indicates whether Jesus was immersed, or had water sprinkled or poured upon Him. Is it possible to arrive at a secure conclusion which mode was used?
7. Did Jesus have to be baptized? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. How did Jesus' baptism differ from others, if it did?
9. What took place immediately following Jesus' baptism?

10. Who said, "It becometh us to fulfill all righteousness"? What did he mean?
11. Cite any evidence that would indicate whether any others than John and Jesus heard and saw the accompanying signs from heaven.
12. What was Jesus doing just as He was baptized?
13. Was there a real dove which descended and alighted upon Jesus? What are your grounds for deciding this? Does it make any difference either way?
14. Whose word are we taking for the extraordinary sights and sounds that occurred that day? Does it make any difference about whether we believe that it actually occurred or not?
15. What did the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus mean to John?
16. What did it mean to Jesus? Did Jesus really need any strengthening, help, encouragement or power, such as the Holy Spirit provides?
17. Is Jesus' baptism an example for us? If not, why not? If so, to what extent or in what way is it so?
18. What did God say about Jesus? What did He mean by that?

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER THREE

"THE MINISTRY OF A MAN"

- I. THE MAN'S MISSION: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness" (3:1-3)
 - A. The sudden appearance of John, who came thundering the message of God, broke the silence that Heaven had kept for over 400 years. John was the last of the greatest prophets (Mt. 11:11, 13). He was a likely candidate for the Messiahship (Lk. 3:15), or at least most commoners were convinced he was a prophet (Lk. 20:6). He performed no miracles (Jn. 10:40, 41) and claimed not to be the Christ (Ac. 13:24, 25), but expected that his message should be received as the very voice of God.
 - B. John's responsibility is clearly that of preparing the hearts of an unprepared people, unprepared for their Messiah's soon arrival. This is the first clue to the true nature of Christ's kingdom: it must not be a matter of external, regal trappings, but of internal, real repenting.

C. John was a "voice" crying in the wilderness, not an echo of the popular slogans of his times. He was not a product of his age, but brought a message from God to his age.

II. THE MAN'S MANNER (3:4): Ascetic food and raiment akin to the austere life of Elijah, significant as they might have been, are nothing compared to the man himself:

A. His personal self-dénial (Lk. 7:33).

B. His refusal to be great in the eyes of the world, even in the sight of his own intimate disciples (Jn. 3:25-30).

C. His fearlessness to denounce evil wherever he found it.

1. Herod trembled before this courageous man who did not hesitate to point the finger of divine judgment at Herod's evil and unlawful marriage and say, "It is not lawful for you to have her!" (Mt. 14:4; Mk. 6:18-20), even if this meant imprisonment and death (Mt. 4:12; 11:2-4; 14:2-10; Mk. 6:14-25).

2. The Sadducees and Pharisees, the leaders of orthodox religion, sunk in ritualistic formalism and infidelity, recoiled under the hammer-blows of this fearless, peerless preaching.

3. The ordinary working people, whose lives were lived unaware of God's plainest commands, were brought to fruitful repentance! (Lk. 3:10-15)

III. THE MAN'S MESSAGE-OF MORALITY (3:5-10)

A. His message and baptism possessed the full authority of God (Mt. 21:25, 26, 32; Mk. 11:30-32; Lk. 3:2; 7:29, 30; Jn. 1:6)

B. His message concerned the most basic need of his hearers: repentance, not merely surface and immediate sorrow for sin, but a thorough-going and continuing repentance that changed the heart and all the life which flowed from the source.

C. In an age of rottenly luxuriant self-indulgence, John challenged men to a rigorous self-denial and a real communion with God, whether this meant fasting (Mt. 9:14; 11:18; Mk. 2:18; Lk. 7:33), or learning how really to pray (Lk. 11:1).

D. His preaching of repentance was intended to produce an open, immediate response:

1. Faith in the Christ who would immediately follow John (Jn. 1:7; Ac. 19:4)
2. But in preparation for His advent, the people must repent, confessing their sins, exhibiting a readiness to effect a radical change of life in conformity with the holiness of the coming Messiah Himself (Mt. 3:5, 6; Lk. 3:5-9)
3. "Baptism for the remission of sins" (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3)

E. He aimed at the conscience.

- IV. THE MAN'S MASTER, THE MESSIAH (3:11, 12). For all of John's personal greatness derived from immediate communion with God, for all of the nation-shaking results he was achieving through his preaching, for all of the personal popularity in the select company of his disciples, he never lost sight of the one purpose he came to accomplish: to bear witness to the Light. John could not but focus men's attention on the majestic Messiah whose way he had come to prepare. John never forgot his place as the servant, unworthy even to unloose the Master's shoes. John ever obliterated himself in his message, and, with the coming of the promised Messiah, he was content to decrease in popularity, influence and religious leadership in favor of his Lord whose way he had so effectively prepared. (Jn. 3:30)

APPLICATION: Laboring within the terms of our commission (Mt. 28:19, 20), dare we give as much to our service to Jesus as did John? Do we seek only the glory of Christ? Are we as unhesitating in our rebuke of the sin of our age?

CHAPTER FOUR

Section 7

JESUS IS TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL

(Parallels: Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13)

TEXT: 4:1-11

1. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he afterward hungered.
3. And the tempter came and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.
4. And he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
5. Then the devil taketh him into the holy city; and he set him on the pinnacle of the temple,
6. and saith unto him, If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and, On their hands they shall bear thee up, Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.
7. Jesus said unto him, Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God.
8. Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;
9. and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.
10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
11. Then the devil leaveth him; and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why was Jesus *led by the Holy Spirit* to be tempted?
- b. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be tempted in this way?
- c. Why was it necessary for Him to be tempted at this time?
- d. What was wrong with each of the devil's proposals?

- e. Do you think Jesus' temptations were like ours?
- f. Is there any way in which Jesus' temptations do not represent *all* our temptations?
- g. Do you think that Jesus really could have sinned? Why?
- h. How much control does the devil really have over the world?
- i. Can some attraction be a temptation to sin if you do not see the wrong in it?
- j. What do you think is the real secret of Jesus' power amidst the attacks of Satan?
- k. What is Matthew's apparent aim in bringing up Jesus' temptations? Or, what do the temptations prove about Jesus?
- l. How do you think the tempter "came to Jesus"? In person? Did he have a physical, visible body? Or did he communicate with Jesus by putting these suggestions into His mind? (Cf. Ac. 5:3)
- m. Do you think that the temptations of Jesus helped to develop His character or was the character that He already possessed merely tested by them, or both? Do temptations, as they are conquered or allowed to conquer, develop strength of character for good or for evil? Or, do they put to trial the character one already possesses?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was immediately driven by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be put to the test by the devil. He was in the wilderness forty days, eating nothing. Afterward, when they were ended, He was starving. Further, during this period, His only companions were the wild animals of that area.

The tempter approached and said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Jesus answered, "It was once written and still stands: 'Man cannot live on bread alone: he must depend upon every word that God utters.'" (Dt. 8:3)

Next, the devil took Him to the holy city, Jerusalem, and causing Him to stand on the very highest ledge of the temple, said to Him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here, for you know what the Psalm (91:11, 12) says,

He will give His angels charge of you to guard you,
On their hands they will bear you up,
Lest you should strike your foot against a stone.'"

"Yes," retorted Jesus, "but the Scripture also says (Dt. 6:16), 'You are not to put the Lord your God on trial.'"

The third time, Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain, and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor in a moment of time, suggested, "I will give all this authority and glory to you, for it has been delivered unto me and I can give it to whom I choose. Now, if you will only fall down and worship me . . ."

But Jesus countered, "Get away from me, Satan! The Scripture still means what it said (Dt. 6:13), 'You shall worship the Lord your God and render service only to Him.'"

So when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Jesus, biding his time until another opportunity arose to tempt Him again. Then angels came and took care of Jesus.

SUMMARY

The Spirit deliberately drove Jesus into the wilderness to be put to the test before the beginning of His ministry. Satan posed three deadly temptations: appetite, audacity and ambition. Jesus repulsed each with a perfect dependence upon God and His Word.

NOTES

4:1 **Jesus was led up into the wilderness** from the scene of His baptism in the Jordan, which is below sea level, up to the rugged, desolate, barren highlands back of Jericho. The actual location of the temptations is unknown. During the forty days Jesus probably wandered a great deal. Inasmuch as the Jordan flows through a wilderness, the fact that Jesus was *led into* the wilderness must mean the deeper solitude of the rugged uninhabited region of the wilderness of Judea.

Only Jesus can be the original reporter of these trials which follow. It is not certain how He intends that we understand the account. Whether the temptations all took place in the wilderness, the three allurements being offered to the mind's eye of Jesus, or whether Jesus left the wilderness to appear first in Jerusalem and then on the summit of a high mountain, we cannot know. Were these temptations offered to Jesus through mental images suggested to Him by Satan while yet in the desert, or was He literally transported from place to place for temptation in the presence of the physical images of the situations offered by Satan? With their characteristic,

profound simplicity, the writers of the gospels narrate these inner conflicts of soul in story form, in order to render them accessible to all men. This is a real struggle, but how is it described?

1. Matthew and Luke both give the impression that they are narrating an event composed of actual facts just as they occurred.
2. However, they might be narrating a pictorial description through symbolic rather than literal facts. Foster (*Introduction*, 335) observes that the temptations might have been just as graphic and powerful if symbolic and presented from the depths of the wilderness.

While the first two temptations seem to be narrations of actual fact, the third temptation contains several elements that would require special interpretations if a literal view of the whole be taken. (See comments on 4:8)

Into the wilderness. Isolation from the "world" is no insulation against temptations. Jesus was placed in this ascetically perfect monastery of the badlands of Judea. His loneliness increased the power and pull of each desire. Beware of the temptation to desire escape from the desires of the world, since you will be taking them along into your isolated retreat. (See special study on *Desires*)

Led by the Spirit. The passive verb in no way expresses a human shrinking from the ordeal that lay ahead of Jesus. The popular translation of Mark 1:12 seem to suggest that Jesus was somehow "thrown out" into the desert against His own will, according to the most obvious etymological meaning of *ekballo* ("to throw out"). Yet, there is evidence that *ekballo* can also be used without the connotation of force (Cf. Mt. 9:38; Lk. 10:2; Jn. 10:4; Jas. 2:25; Ac. 16:37). Matthew and Luke use words (*ago* and *anago*) which signify simply "to lead, bring." Thus, rather than being reluctant to face the coming trials, Jesus willingly followed the Spirit's direction. The will of God is clearly seen in the fact that this mighty battle shall be waged at this time and not later in Jesus' ministry. Human wisdom might have postponed this encounter, because it was to be so decisive. But Jesus did not either shrink from the battle nor rashly seek to be tempted. Rather, He sought to be led by God's Spirit.

To be tempted. But why did the Spirit put Jesus in this position?

1. Jesus must be put to these extreme tests to develop that moral vigor and firmness that is only acquired through self-discipline under fire. (Cf. Heb. 2:9, 10; 5:8, 9) He must define for Himself and perfect those principles that would govern His ministry, those goals that He would always seek, those interests that would always control Him.
2. He must personally conquer Satan. It is impossible that Satan should not defend himself from the attacks of this One who is come to destroy everything that gave Satan control of this earth's peoples. He must become our Savior from sin by this great victory which reached its climax in His glorious resurrection.
3. He must learn personally the full power of human desires in order to sympathize perfectly with lost tempted men and save them. Only he who has felt all of a temptation's force and yet has stood firm can help those who have fallen. He must know fully what it is like to be a man, so as to qualify Himself to be our Priest and yet be our Sacrifice without blemish. (Cf. Heb. 2:9-18; Phil. 2:7, 8)
4. He must show His tempted followers how to overcome trials by His own impressive example. No apology need be made for Him! He has already faced our temptations and beaten them.

By the devil. Satan must have been fully aware of the impact of the outcome of this encounter: if he could vanquish Jesus, even by the smallest triumph conceivable, he could retain the world. But if he failed to subdue Him, then he must relinquish his sway over mankind and, trembling, await his final doom. Satan must have known also the demands of the perfect justice of God: Jesus must be an absolutely sinless sacrifice for sins. No marginal errors in the life of Jesus, once committed, could be corrected, offset or made good. The implication is inescapable that Satan knew that it would be possible for Jesus to sin. Thus, Satan was desperately determined to probe to the utmost this possibility for the moral corruption of God's Champion. The devil had laughed in God's face as, by one seduction or another, he had broken every man of God that had arisen since Adam. Before him now stood God's Best. "So this is God's Messiah? I broke the first Adam and his race; I'll break the Second at once!"

4:2 **He fasted forty days and forty nights.** Luke's terse comment, "He ate nothing," may emphasize an absolute abstinence from all food, or perhaps may be taken relatively to mean "He ate nothing but such as the desert provides, drinking water only." Compare similar expressions in Mt. 3:4 with Mt. 11:18; Lk. 7:33. An absolute and total abstinence from all food and all drink is not physically impossible (Ex. 34:28; I Kg. 19:8). Chronologically, these 40 days are wintry, cold and rainy. This is found by counting backward from the Passover in April, using the chronological notices in Jn. 1:29-43; 2:1-13. Fifty days to two months for the total calculation would push the time back to the beginning of February if not the end of January, depending upon whether the paschal moon occurred near the end of March or beginning of April. How these difficult weather conditions must have added to the Savior's suffering in the wilderness! It was a period perfectly adapted to try the durability of anyone's patient faith and physical endurance out in the wilds of that Judean wilderness. *He fasted.* There is no evidence that Jesus imposed upon Himself any unnecessary austerities. This fast is rather a necessity imposed by His situation in the wilderness, than a self-imposed observance of a law of fasting. (See notes on 6:16-18)

Afterward he hungered. He was so deeply engrossed in thought, prayer and planning of His short whirlwind ministry that lay ahead that He did not notice the effects of His fasting. Certainly, He felt normal hunger pains before; this is now starvation. The suggestion is made by some that the body of Jesus did not feel hunger of the forty-day fast until its conclusion, either because it was miraculously sustained during that period, or else because its power of endurance far exceeds ours since it was wholly unaffected by sin. Both views mistake both the nature of the body of Jesus and the will of God for His Son. God willed that Jesus should be made in every respect like mankind (Heb. 2:14, 17). To suppose special provisions and protections for Jesus is to create for Him that condition Satan desired: a compromise of His incarnation by using special means to sustain Himself. Further, moral freedom from sin does not give Jesus freedom from "the same nature" that man shares (Heb. 2:9, 10, 14, 17) or from "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Ro. 8:2).

What was Jesus doing during this forty-day period? Probably He was wrestling with the great problems He must soon resolve: How shall He, as God's Messiah, save a world that has fallen before Satan's enticements? Will He measure up to the great expectations

expressed by the Father at His baptism? How shall He perfect the plans of His heart? He knew the views and feelings of Israel, their expectations, their prejudices, their sins. If He submitted to the will of God by offering them a spiritual kingdom founded upon spiritual principles, He would have to stand practically alone against the whole nation. It would mean only helpless, hopeless suffering of all their misunderstandings, betrayals and their ultimate rejection. It would mean, finally, the lonely, bitter agonies of a cross. How could He hope to convince them? There are times when men must stop thinking and act; this is a time when Jesus must not act until He has thought through every move He must make. How often, after some great crisis in our experience, we regret that we made the move or said the words we did, or perhaps we see how the issue of that crisis could have been so much happier, had we reacted to it in some other fashion. So critical is every move, every speech, every attitude, that Jesus will have no room for misjudgment or error. Each day spent in that Judean desert only increased His sense of utter loneliness as He foresaw how difficult it would be to train those few disciples whose minds would be the most open. The seeming futility of such an endeavor as the proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom must have weighed down upon Jesus with oppressive force as He grew physically weaker. It was then that the tempter came.

I. APPETITE

4:3 **The tempter came.** Since both Mark and Luke declare that during His fast, Jesus was being tempted (present participle: *peirazomenos*), it would seem that the three temptations narrated were either extended over that forty-day period, or else they are selected by Jesus as typical of the whole range of sinful suggestions offered Him. It could also indicate that, though He was being tempted over the entire period, the intensity of the allurements has just been stepped up. The devil came in person. The outcome of this struggle was to be so decisive, the stakes so high, he could entrust this attack to no lesser agent. He must permit no bungling, no excuses for failure.

The Tempter: we have just as much evidence for believing that he exists as an evil personality as we have evidence for a personal God, for our knowledge of their existence rests upon the same testimony, that of Jesus. If Jesus merely accommodated His words to the

popular error of "those unenlightened times," then what He reveals about God loses its value to declare otherwise unknowable truth, since this too might be mere accommodation to popular error. Jesus has left no way for His interpreters to know when He might have been accommodating and when He was revealing unadulterated truth. He claimed to be the very revelation of God Himself and, unless He be charged with dishonesty, ignorance or insanity, then His words are to be accepted as stating the actual case. Further, He did not merely "accommodate" for only one or two occasions (if, in fact, He ever did), for He had much to reveal about the spirit world over which Satan is chief. (See Mt. 12:22-29; 13:19, 38, 39; 25:41; Mk. 3:22; 4:15; Lk. 8:12; 10:18; 11:14-23; 13:16; 22:31; Jn. 8:44; 12:41; 13:2, 27; 14:30. Study also Ac. 5:3; 26:18; II Co. 2:11; 4:4; 11:14; 12:7; Eph. 2:2; 6:11; I Th. 2:9, 18; Jas. 4:7; I Pe. 5:8, 9; I Jn. 3:8, 10; Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2, 3, 8, 10.)

If you are God's Son could have two meanings, both of which serve the devil's purposes:

1. There was no doubt in Satan's mind but these words are intended to taunt Jesus, inciting Him to prostitute His divine powers to selfish purposes: "No doubt you ARE God's Son and thus equipped with miraculous powers that could at once feed your starving stomach. Admitted that you ARE His Beloved, are you not being unjustly deprived of something good? Should you, of all persons, suffer thus? And, YOU can do miracles! You could put an end to your present suffering and doubts about how to use your wonderful power. You will become the visible possessor of this power and the food will provide the strength to begin your life work." This is an invitation to doubt God's goodness and providential care.
2. There was no doubt in Satan's mind but these words are intended to incite doubt in Jesus: "Has God really said, 'You are my beloved Son, 'and then left you to starve? Were you REALLY God's Son, as God seemed to suggest at your baptism, could such a Father be trusted who leaves His 'well-beloved' out here in the wilderness to die? If you had such powers worthy of such a Son as God would claim, then you could furnish me proof and at the same time satisfy that gnawing hunger!" Jesus could be tempted in this case to rebuke Satan by giving miraculous proof of His identity, but

to have done so would have resulted in obedience to Satan's sinful suggestion. This is the provocation to doubt God's truthfulness.

3. The possibility that Satan doubted Jesus' Sonship is not too likely, else he would not have staked so much upon the conquest of Jesus. It is more likely that Satan tempted Jesus so thoroughly because he knew exactly who He was.

At the very heart of this suggestion lies the problem of the very existence of Jesus: He was alone in the wilderness and about to starve to death. Surely He had come from heaven for greater purposes than to perish unknown right there in the desert suffering such torture. A man must live, it is said. Did not Jesus have the right to live, even if it meant to create food miraculously for the sustenance of His life?

4:4 **It is written!** Jesus' citations of Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) demonstrate two tremendous conclusions:

1. Jesus Himself is choosing to control His desires by bringing them into subjection to the will of God as revealed in His Word (Study the implications of the truth as applied to life, Ro. 8)
2. Because Jesus is also God's Anointed, sent to reveal God's mind, His citation of Deuteronomy stamps the Penteteuch collection of the first five books of the Old Testament as the Word of God. Let those who are confused by the multitudinous and contradictory critical theories on the origin of those books hear the voice of Jesus!

Whatever the devil's meaning in his equivocal phrase, "If you are the Son of God," Jesus did not reply to it by direct demonstration of His identity either by miraculous proof that Satan had demanded or by enlightening debate sustaining the proposition, "I am God's Son." Rather, He reveals a more basic question involved, a problem that touches every man: "What is the true ground of man's being? Is it matter or spirit? Is it bread or the word of God? What really sustains man?" (Cf. Psa. 19:7-11; 119; Jn. 1:1-3; I Jn. 2:17; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:1-3; cf. "word of God" in II Pet. 3:5, 7.) Jesus graphically declares the true foundation of man's being to be "anything God says."

If one is faced with the choice of a life compromised by sin, or a death for righteousness, he does not HAVE to live. A man may choose to starve to death, rather than steal food. On the anvil of this wilderness experience is hammered out Jesus' decision: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work." (Jn. 4:34) It is far better to starve for sake of a right principle than to eat food misappropriated.

Here Jesus was fighting like a dying man as our Champion who faced this very real battle at His very weakest. Yet, if He is to save others, Himself He cannot save. Self-denial is the rule of His kingdom. Yes, even the Son of God will live as every other man, without special provision. He will not make an exception for Himself, for doing so would have compromised the purpose of His incarnation. "He was made in all things like unto His brethren" for the specific purpose of "suffering being tempted" and to "help them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15). Therefore, He never utilized supernatural power to alleviate His hunger, thirst, weariness, pain or grief.

If Satan suggested that Jesus, as God's Son, has a right to help Himself to miraculously-created bread, Jesus ignores this advice by revealing an even wider trust in God than that which one would expect in a miracle worker: "Man, any man and not merely God's Son, should trust God and live according to God's Word, rather than according to their fleshly needs. God knows my hunger and He is completely trustworthy to provide in His own way. He will not give me stones when I need loaves!" (Cf. Mt. 6:32; 7:9)

Further, Jesus depended upon His Bible for guidance, not upon special supernatural wisdom. He used the weapon against Satan, that is available to every man. (Cf. Eph. 6:17) Jesus had learned these Scriptures. Only because He had stored His memory full with them, meditated their meaning and related them to the practical problems of life—only because He had so thoroughly saturated Himself, in the same way in which any other man could learn God's Word, only thus did these texts come to Him "naturally." Here is written our condemnation: have we such a command of our Scriptures that we are able to expose Satan's lies for what they are? Do we live in such daily contact with the truth that the false is immediately exposed because of the contrast?

If Jesus had miraculous power, whence came it? To whom did He owe it? Since He depended upon the Father even for this power (Jn. 5:19-36), could the Father not be trusted for bread? Of course

He can. So Jesus will show the trust of any true son of God. Though it is not immediately apparent from the circumstances how God will provide the food, yet Jesus will wait and trust Him. The context of the OT passage, on which Jesus' resolute refusal depends, makes His words ring the more truly. Read the whole eighth chapter of Deuteronomy to appreciate the full impact of Jesus' answer.

Note that Jesus did not seek to change His circumstances. He could have wished that He had not been caught hungry, unknown and uncrowned. Rather, He dealt with the temptation exactly as it came to Him in that circumstance. It is yet another temptation to think when tempted that, were the circumstances different, the response would have been better. But the very purpose of God for letting men be tempted or tried is to produce men who will do God's will under whatever circumstance.

Whether this temptation is messianically symbolic or not, certain results with messianic implications would have followed from Jesus' surrender to it. Had Jesus used His miraculous power to satisfy Himself in this one case, it would have been much easier to use it thus to relieve some of the stresses, strains and painful moments of His ministry.

How do we face this same temptation under other forms? Are we ever tempted to use what is in our power for our own selfish ends? What about the money we have earned? Our talents? Exists there a church that has never said to itself, "I must build my cathedral before considering the needs for more evangelism, more Christian education and care for the old folks and orphans"? Or, lives there a Christian anywhere who, during some crisis, has never wondered, "Does God really know I exist, that I suffer thus? Does He really care?"

II. AUDACITY

4:5 **Then the devil taketh him.** The verb "took" is probably to be understood in the same sense in which the Spirit "led" Jesus up from the Jordan, since the Greek verbs are the same in both cases.

Mt. 4:1 uses *anago*; Lk. 4:1, 5, 9 uses *ago* and *anago*, whereas in the parallel of Mt. 4:5, 8 *paralambano* is substituted without apparent change in meaning.

Pinnacle of the temple in the holy city. In Jerusalem the most imposing height offering the longest fall would be the southeast

corner of the temple court, a point which towered above the Kedron valley some 300-400 feet, depending upon where measurement was taken. Arndt-Gingrich define the word *pterugion* ("pinnacle") as the "tip, end, edge, extremity or summit of something." Edersheir, *Life*, I, 244) describes a tower that was supposed to have been located on that corner, raising the height to 450 feet. Any point in the temple area so high that a fall from it would be fatal is probably all that is meant.

4:6 Cast thyself down. One feature of this temptation might not be so apparent to us upon first reading of the text, for the temptation to presumption lies most directly upon the surface and easy to see without reflection. This is so because of Jesus' reply to Satan. Yet, any precipice in the desert would have sufficed for the mere physical of leaping from the heights to be safely, gently landed upon the ground borne upon the hands of the angels. But why, then, *the temple's pinnacle?* Is the devil suggesting that the crowded courts or streets below would provide a fitting theatre onto which the Lord could leap to begin His marvelous ministry with a "sign from heaven" which would command the instant belief and loyal obedience of the Jews? Is he opening before Him the easy successes possible to a Superman, obscuring the lasting results that God sought through preaching, teaching and daily fellowship, however slow and difficult that latter way might be? If so, in succumbing to this suggestion, Jesus would be committing God to a course of action, forcing the Father to justify ever greater sensations, a course foredoomed to failure. Faith that would depend upon such signs is not the confident trust that God seeks.

If Satan is not placing before Jesus the allurements to descend, borne of angels into the midst of priests and people, but rather is trying to trap Jesus in His personal response to God, then this is a temptation to fanatic presumption. Satan could well know how prone human nature is to go to opposite extremes. Jesus had just demonstrated so beautiful a trust in the heavenly Father in answer to the first temptation, that the tempter now takes advantage of this human proneness to extremes by suggesting, "All right, if you are going to trust God so much, show your faith by something more spectacular, more decisive than mere patient hunger! Put some specific promise of God to some clear-cut test. Psalm 91:11, 12 promises you God's protection for just such a case as this. So throw yourself down from

this dizzy height to the solid rock below! By so doing, you can demonstrate your unquestioning faith in God, and show yourself to be the Messiah to those who see this thrilling sign from heaven!"

What would be more justifiable than such a leap? Yet, Jesus' answer reveals the fallacy. The urge to hazard His life merely to prove His trust in God and demonstrate His Sonship, would really have meant to doubt God's express declaration and presumptuously to put God on trial. Such a trial is the more presumptuous because God had already proved often enough that He keeps His Word. The devil's suggestion deliberately obscures the weightier question whether God must yield to every unreasonable whim of those fanatics who, while protesting faith in God, demonstrate practical disbelief of His declarations by putting Him to a test.

He shall give His angels charge concerning thee. The Psalm (91:11, 12) that Satan quotes, when read in its entirety, fits the situation quite exactly. The whole Psalm depicts the security against various dangers, that is enjoyed by the man who trusts God. Hence, it applies to any son of God. Satan has merely invented a particular test to which God's general promise may be put to see if He will keep His Word. The deception does not rest in a supposed misquotation of the verses by Satan (he left out "to keep thee in all thy ways"), because Jesus accepted the quotation as being substantially correct. The Psalm, however, does not teach that man may choose the path nor may he command God to act by rescuing him from the extremes of man's follies. Rather, it means that in faith man must follow God, letting God be God. In this latter frame of reference, man will enjoy the blessed security of God's providence. The trap is hidden in the phrase "to see if He will keep His word . . ."

4:7 Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God.

Again Jesus shows that He will not run before God, but chooses rather to be led by Him. He clearly will not, of His own choice, create unnecessary dangers, but will avoid them unless they fall in the path of obedience to the Father's will. He shows Himself to be a man of common sense, true sanity and genuine wisdom. Neither will He seek to place God under obligation to back His plans for His ministry. Though Satan had made it appear otherwise, it took more trust in God NOT to leap than to do so. Jesus answers simply, "Testing is not trusting."

Study the disappointing but enlightening history of Israel for its examples of those who made trial of God: Ex. 14:10-12; 16:3; 17:1-7; Num. 14:1-11; 21:4, 5. Compare the divine commentary on these examples, offered in I Cor. 10:6-11 and Heb. 3:1—4:11. Testing God not only involves disbelief of His promises but also may involve disobedience to His specific commands not to make trial of Him. The end result may be open rebellion. Falsifying in money matters is one way to try God (Ac. 5:3, 4, 9). Changing the basis of salvation is called by Peter "putting God on trial" (Ac. 15:10).

This question of forcing God to back up His Servant Jesus will come up again in Jesus' ministry, suggested by the impudent challenges of the Jews, demanding that He "show a sign from heaven." (Mt. 12:38f; Lk. 11:16; Mt. 16:1-4) In their presence He could have called upon God to perform stupendous feats in nature. Hanging on the cross, He would have occasion to remember this moment, for other voices would jeer, "He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Mt. 27:43)

Again, Jesus demonstrated that He knew His Bible. He corrected a common misuse of God's promises by showing that the interpretation of those promises, which was offered by Satan, contradicted the clear command of God. (Dt. 6:16)

III. AMBITION

4:8 **exceeding high mountain.** If a literal view of these temptations be taken, this verse contains several elements that would require special interpretation:

1. **An exceeding high mountain.** Supernatural vision must be assumed, since no known mountain peak however high could provide such a literal panorama as the Evangelists describe.
2. **He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world.** If all the world's kingdoms be taken in its absolute sense, some special vision is required. However, if it be taken in a relative sense to include only those visible to the naked eye as representative of all, then it is possible to take a literal view of the text, since vast panoramic views are afforded by a number of Palestinean peaks.

3. **And the glory of them.** This is a quality of those kingdoms not visible to any normal, naked eye; hence, the phrase must imply a miraculous, if not a mental, vision.
4. Luke adds "**in a moment of time**" (4:5), apparently compressing the extent of such a vision into a few minutes.

There is no difficulty in assuming that Jesus had supernatural vision to see all that Satan offered or in assuming that Satan drew word pictures of all the world's kingdoms and their glories, because, as a matter of fact, the Evangelists do not tell how "he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world."

4:9 **All these things will I give thee.** Since Satan offered Jesus "kingdoms," he must have known what question was keenly before His mind: how He would establish the kingdom of God. This fact made Jesus a particularly clear target for this attack. Note that the phrase, "If you are God's Son," is missing. Even to have mentioned Jesus' Sonship at this time would not have served the devil's purposes to make Him relax His grip on the Father in order to worship the tempter.

Satan is desperately laying his trap, "If Jesus is really a man of faith and common sense, surely He will take the shortest, most direct route to that universal control He is seeking. If I can just maneuver His natural desire for power and the normal wish to avoid difficulty and suffering, perhaps I can make him an offer He cannot refuse." Turning to Jesus, the tempter spoke, "Look, Jesus, look! What do you see? You see the grandeur of a thousand kingdoms passing before your eyes. Look at that uncounted wealth and stunning beauty! It could be yours. Do you hear those sounds? They are the tramping feet of soldiers marching at your command. It is the busy hum of commerce and industry creating new wealth to pour at your feet in tribute, It is the shout of lusty voices proclaiming you universal ruler of the earth. As the prince of this world, I am in a position to offer you all this!"

How much control does the devil really hold over the world? If Jesus knew that Satan were lying, then this would have been no great temptation. It is worthy of note that He did not call Satan a liar for saying that these kingdoms were his to give. However, if he is telling the truth, then the ambitions of Jesus could be realized in an instant and the "inevitable" cross could be avoided.

As stated, this was an apparently rational offer and a very desirable proposal. The kingdom of Satan is no figure of speech, because the Gospels contain constant reference to the power of Satan in the world as a reign opposed to God. (Cf. Mt. 12:25-28; Lk. 11:17; see also Mt. 6:13; 13:19, 25, 39; 25:41; Lk. 10:18; 22:3, 28, 31; Jn. 8:44; 12:31; 13:27; 14:30; 16:11.) Satan speaks as if he were the *rightful* ruler in *complete* control of the whole world (Lk. 4:6). This is certainly false, because the fact that he so persistently seeks to tempt and master men proves that he does not yet completely possess them. Further, whatever authority he may possess is by usurpation.

Humanly speaking, Jesus needed everything that the devil was offering. He had no reputation, no formal religious education or degrees from accredited universities, no powerful friends who could exert their influence in His favor in a world where men advance their causes by treading upon each other. Yet, He is contemplating the advancing of His Father's rule by spiritual methods and by the conversion of single individuals to His message of ideals. He well understood that this latter approach would be the slowest, most difficult, most discouraging and finally the most disappointing of the two choices.

Assuming that Satan is telling the truth, how could he really give all the human kingdoms to Jesus? Simply by fulfilling all of the most common Jewish conceptions of the messianic kingdom! Satan could rally the entire Jewish nation around Jesus, restore to Him the throne and glory of David, force the nations to bring all their wealth to Jerusalem and put every Jew on state payrolls. How often the echo of Satan's whisper was heard! (Mt. 16:22; Lk. 22:49(?); Jn. 6:14, 15; 7:3, 4; 12:32-34; 18:36; Ac. 1:6) Jesus could forget the hardships, the confusion, the rejection, the cross, and He could so much more simply establish His world dominion.

If you will fall down and worship me. These are Satan's terms. He chooses his words carefully, because upon them depends his ultimate success. Satan is neither ignorant nor stupid. He knows that worship basically involves the acknowledgement of him as true lord and rightful disposer of kingdoms. If he can entice Jesus into admitting His dependence upon him rather than God, then he will have tricked Jesus into transgressing the most basic commandment known (Dt. 5:7-9; 6:4, 13) To the western ear, the word "worship" would immediately have warned of the idolatry involved. But Satan uses a general word (*proskuneo*, see note on 2:2) that may suggest

no more than the obeisance rendered by an inferior to a superior among men. If only "worship as if offered only to God" were meant, Jesus would have immediately drawn back in holy horror with the result that, for Jesus, all of the enticement would be stricken from the temptation merely by stating it. Admittedly, Satan's choice of words is admirable, because of the ambiguity.

By putting in the condition which demanded at least oriental obeisance, Satan subtly presses Jesus for a compromise. Perhaps he intends the compromising of Jesus' ideal of "a kingdom not of this world" in favor of a worldly kingdom. Jesus could still rule the world by using Satan's methods: war, political intrigues, brute force. Satan presents this attractive offer as a real, immediate victory for Jesus, when in reality it would have been His real surrender. The transfer would be only an illusion. It is that old perennial lie: "You may be your own king, do as you please, as long as you are my servant!"

But has there ever existed a church or a Christian which has not surrendered to Satan Jesus' ideal, "the kingdom of God," for a greater share of the control of the world's kingdoms? Who has not, at one time or another, mistaken might for right and regimentation for regeneration? How often has ambition to rule conquered those who have conquered all else!

4:10 High above this moving scene of glory and beauty which Satan paints before the eyes of Jesus, the Son of God can see another vision: the Kingdom of God in which men of every tribe, people, nation and tongue come streaming from afar, bringing all their wealth, glory, praise and service to lay them down in humble worship at His feet. He can see the day of His coronation at His Father's right hand, enthroned to reign until all His enemies should be made the footstool of His feet, until every tongue confess to the glory of God that Jesus Christ is Lord! God had already promised His Son universal world control (Psa. 2:7-12). The offer of Satan is exposed for what it really is: a tarnishing glitter, a crumbling pile of stones, dying men, ashes and dust.

Get thee hence, Satan. This practical expression of idolatry that Satan has offered Jesus is too much. Satan has lost. He has no more to offer the Master. Jesus' shout clarifies the issues: "Satan, the end never justifies the means. The kingdom that I desire has at its very heart the bringing of worship only to the Lord God, not the

crowning of your original rebellion. I cannot divide my allegiance nor compromise God's will even as a means to a holy end, for to do so would contaminate the result. Therefore, the means of establishing my kingdom must also be holy: teaching men to worship and serve only God!" From this moment, the victory cry will continue to ring down through time, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" (Jn. 16:33)

4:11 **Then the devil leaveth him**, baffled and disappointed. Satan is not invincible. This smashing victory of Jesus and all the battles won by those who dare use Jesus' methods prove it. (I Co. 10:13; Eph. 6:10-18; I Pet. 5:8, 9) The conquest of Satan in these three temptations does not mean that Jesus was tempted by all possible temptations, for temptations come in infinite variations. But He was tempted at all points at which temptation can touch a soul. This is one of the world's greatest moments. It has just been proved that one human being, reduced to his weakest physical extremity and seduced by Satan's deadliest suggestions, by sheer trust in God, by unhesitating refusals and by unrelenting reliance upon God's revelation, could resist temptation and refuse to sin. Jesus has just shown that it was possible for all men not to sin.

Luke notes (4:13) that the devil departed until other opportunities should present themselves for further attack. Further temptations came later (Mk. 1:32-39; Jn. 6:14, 15; Mt. 16:23; Lk. 22:28; Mt. 27:40-43).

Angels came and ministered unto him. He who would not have Satan's satellites as His servants, is now served by God's servants. (Mt. 26:53; Jn. 1:51; Heb. 1:6-14; cf. I Kg. 19:5ff) If they brought Him food, then His faith, which trusted God to the limit, is further justified in this significant way. (Cf. 4:3, 4)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the temptations of Jesus, noting the differences in the various Gospel reports.
2. Tell why Jesus was tempted at each point, noting to what human characteristics Satan made his appeal each time.
3. How did Jesus meet each temptation? Be specific about each one.
4. What do Jesus' temptations mean to us?
5. Is there any connection between the temptations of Jesus and what was said about Him at the time of His baptism?

6. Why did Jesus go out into the wilderness?
7. What wilderness was it?
8. What was the Holy Spirit's purpose in taking Jesus there?
9. Why was not Jesus hungry until after the fast? (Cf. 4:2)
10. How could Satan have shown Jesus all of the world's kingdoms?
11. Explain what is meant by "tempting God."
12. Did the world's kingdoms really belong to Satan?
13. Did the temptations have any relation to Jesus' world mission? If so, what relationship?
14. What is the relationship between knowing the Word and will of God and resisting temptations?
15. What does Jesus' use of the OT as the final authority for His actions reveal about:
 - a. The OT as the progressive revelation given by God to a particular people?
 - b. the application of the Bible in general to particular problems faced by the believer?
16. What are temptations? Wherein does their real power lie? Can they always be recognized? If so, under what circumstances? If not, why not? Why should we pray to avoid temptations (Mt. 6:13)? Why does God allow His Son and His children to be tempted? Is something a temptation if one cannot see the wrong in it?

SPECIAL STUDY: TEMPTATION

I. THE LORD'S LIABILITY TO ALLUREMENT.

A. *Could Jesus be tempted so as to sin?* Yes must be the unequivocal response, because His incarnation necessitates it. If we are to believe that Jesus was to be tempted in *all* respects in which a human being is tempted (Heb. 4:15), then we are led to the realization that His subjection to every sort of human seduction must have begun long before the period forty days after His baptism. His birth was unique and miraculous, but His youth was normal in the human environment of Nazareth. His adult life indeed was marvelous, one-of-a-kind, yet fully human. It must be ever remembered that the Word was God before He became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:1-14), but that fact must never be made to cast doubt upon the reality of the flesh in which He dwelt (Heb. 2:14). With the Father He shares these characteristics:

1. He lived without sin (Heb. 4:15; 7:26; I Pet. 1:19; 2:21; 3:18; Jn. 8:46; I Jn. 3:5; II Cor. 5:21).
2. He faultlessly expressed God's character and nature (II Cor. 4:4-6; Jn. 8:29; 10:30; 12:45; Col. 1:15-19; 2:9; Heb. 1:1-3).
3. He fulfilled all of God's purposes (Jn. 10:17, 18, 36-38; 12:27; 15:10; Eph. 1:3-11; II Cor. 5:19).
4. He maintained that unique contact with God in a union unknown to all human experience and unshared by any other (Jn. 1:1-14; 10:30; 5:19, 20; 12:49, 50; 14:10, 11).

However, there are significant differences between the Father and the Son:

1. God cannot be tempted with evil, while Jesus was subject to all human temptations (Jas. 1:13; Heb. 2:14-18; Heb. 4:15) although He did not surrender Himself to any.
2. God is not subject to spiritual growth (I Pet. 1:16; Mt. 5:48), while Jesus advanced toward spiritual maturity (Lk. 2:40, 52; Heb. 2:10-18; 5:7-9), qualifying Himself to be man's Savior.
3. The Father was the object of Jesus' faith and the Hearer of His prayers (Heb. 5:7; Mt. 11:25, 26; Jn. 11:41, 42). Although Jesus was the Revealer of the mind of God, yet He received the Word of God as already revealed in the OT, putting His trust in it and obeying its precepts impeccably.
4. Jesus was born subject to law (Gal. 4:4); God was not. "Born under law" to Jesus meant responsibility for keeping or breaking it. If Jesus could not sin by breaking law, the law would be meaningless to Him.
5. The point of Jesus' assumption of human nature is that He might die for man's sins (Heb. 2:9, 14, 15); God could not die. (Cf. I Ti. 1:17; 6:16)
6. Jesus was fully man (Ro. 5:17-21; I Co. 15:21; Ac. 17:31), a body for the dwelling of all the fulness of Deity (Col. 1:19; 2:9)

The incarnation is the unique ^{ex}perience of Jesus only. He was thoroughly *man* and thoroughly *deity*. Human ignorance and per-

sonal "lack of" experience of this verity does not militate against its historicity. It is to be received on the strength of Jesus' truthfulness and His authority to reveal it.

There are several consequences that follow from believing that He could not actually be tempted to sin. Rejection of all that the Scriptures say regarding His human nature is serious enough, for that blames God for condemning man without knowing what being a man is really like. Further, if Jesus did not genuinely share all our human desires, His victory over Satan is a hollow, meaningless conquest as far as it concerns our facing of temptations. In that case, He could not provide us a true example that would help us to overcome, since there would always remain in us the suspicion that Jesus was some sort of angelic machine which "could not be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses."

But the Scripture evidences the fact that Jesus could sin by surrender to the devil's enticements. Out of this truth flow exciting conclusions.

1. Jesus has felt the fullest intensity of every temptation to sin, because He did not yield. It is not the man who is allured before feeling the last full measure of temptation who fully understands that seduction before which he has fallen, nor can he be perfectly sympathetic with other sinners in their trials, for he sinned before knowing the full power of the enticement. Only the sinless Jesus, who has resisted the pull of the desire clear to its end, can effectively come to the aid of those who have fallen.
2. Jesus conquered Satan, not as God but as man, any man, could have repelled the tempter. By using no special defenses available only to the "Son of God," He wrestled sin's mightiest champion as would any "son of God"—and won! But by doing this, He strikes from our mouths all of the lame excuses we offer for our sins. By risking all of Jesus' purity, and consequently, the world's salvation, on the outcome of such temptations as those in the wilderness, God shows for all eternity the inexcusability of human sin. Were there any question before, now no doubt is left as to why God is justified in sending the whole human race to hell. (Ro. 3:9, 19, 20, 23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22)

B. *Wherein was Jesus tempted?* The hesitation to admit the liability of our Lord to temptation is probably traceable to defective

views of His nature. These arise out of a natural tendency to over-emphasize either His deity or His manhood. Also the feebleness of human language to express such majestic truth as the incarnation of God "in 25 words or less," often cripples the truth rather than strengthens or clarifies it. May we generalize just to this extent: if the baptismal event of Jesus says to the world that this Man was God, then the temptation experience proclaims to all ages that this God also became Man. It is from this latter point of view that we study His temptations.

Jesus was perfectly sinless before and after the temptations, but He was a perfectly sinless *human* with all the desires that characterize life in the human body. Incarnation brings with it the characteristics of the *carnis*, flesh, one of which is temptability. But what is temptation?

A temptation is anything that throws the character into the crisis of choice. This is done by an incitement of *natural desires* to go beyond the limits set. Temptation is also a conflict of loyalties, a putting other good things above one's first loyalties. (Cf. Mt. 10:36 with Mk. 3:21; Jn. 12:27) The power of temptation lies in *human desires*. These are created by God in the make-up of the human personality, but may all be stimulated by Satan to thwart God's purpose for those desires. The Greeks had one word for these God-given desires (*epithumia*), a word which they used to describe right desires or longings as well as desires for something forbidden. The complex of desires in the human personality, as God designed it, is like a powerful rocket which can hurl an astronaut into space to explore the universe and advance man's knowledge, or it can hurl a nuclear warhead at other men to destroy lives. The rocket has the capacity for both operations. What it actually does depends upon who determines its use and controls it. The desires in our personality serve as fuel and power for the rocket, while our conscience is the guidance system. Thus, what we do depends upon the orientation data fed into our conscience, which, in turn, controls our desires. But, unlike the electronic brain in the rocket, our conscience can be affected by our desires, and it is exactly at these desires that temptations make their attack. If so, then Jesus, "who was tempted in all points like as we are (*kata panta kath' homoiotêta*)," felt the stress and strain of His basic human desires. But what are these desires? We shall see them more clearly as we are led to understand . . .

II. OUR SUSCEPTIBILITY TO SINFUL SUGGESTION.

A, *A Matter of Desire*. The Christian view of personal desires is expressed by James: "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires." (Jas. 1:14 RSV) The following passages clarify this view. The Greek words, which are used to express the desire, are included in parenthesis for further comparison. Note that the passages are arranged into two groups: those expressions of right and proper desires, and those expressions that degenerate human desire into passion and lust. The more significant passages are printed in *italic* type.

GOOD, PROPER EXPRESSIONS OF DESIRE DESIRE AS LUST, PASSION

(epithumia, epithumēō)

Mt. 13:17; Lk. 15:16; 16:21; 17:22; 22:15; *Gal. 5:17*; Phil. 1:23; I Th. 2:17; I Tim. 3:1; Heb. 6:11; I Pet. 1:12; I Jn. 2:15-17 (?)

(epipothēō)

Ro. 1:11; Phil. 1:8; 2:26; II Co. 5:2; 7:7, 11; 9:14; I Th. 3:6; II Tim. 1:4; *I Pet. 2:2*

(zēloō)

I Cor. 12:31; 14:1, 39; II Cor. 11:2; *Gal. 4:18 (?)*

(thelō)

Mt. 16:24; 19:21; 26:39; *Mk. 10:43, 44*; 14:36; *Jn. 7:17*; 15:7; 12:21; *Ro. 7:15, 18, 19*

(zēteō)

Mt. 6:21, 33; *Lk. 12:31, 34*; *Jn. 5:30, 44*; 7:18; 8:50; *Ro. 2:7*; *Col. 3:1ff*; II Cor. 12:14

(epizēteō): *Heb. 13:14**(oregomai)*: *Heb. 11:16**(eudokia)*: *Ro. 10:1*; *II Th. 1:11**(epithumia, epithumēō)*

Mt. 5:28; *Mk. 4:19*; Jn. 8:44; Ac. 20:33, 34; Ro. 1:24; 6:12; 7:7f; 13:9, 14; I Co. 10:6; *Gal. 5:16, 17, 24*; *Eph. 2:3, 4:22*; *Col. 3:5*; I Th. 4:5; *I Tim. 6:9*; II Tim. 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; Tit. 2:12; 3:3; Jas. 1:14; 4:2; I Pet. 1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3; II Pet. 1:4; 2:10; 3:3; *I Jn. 2:15-17*; Jd. 16, 18; Rev. 9:6

(zēloō)

I Cor. 13:4

(thelō)

Mt. 16:25; Jn. 5:40; 6:67; 8:44; I Th. 3:10

Some OT examples of good desires are the following: Ps. 21:2; 27:4; 37:4; 145:19; Prov. 10:24; 11:23; II Chron. 15:15; Isa. 26:8)

The following is a list of desires common to every man. As you respond to their force in your life, who or what governs what you will do about their demands?

1. The desire to PRESERVE SELF: satisfying body needs for food, clothing, shelter; self-defense by flight or fighting; repulsion.
2. MATING desires: sex; care for family; the appeal of one's young.
3. SOCIAL desires; gregariousness; companionship; approval; self-assertion; pride; ambition; competition.
4. Desires to SUBMIT: tendency to imitate heroes; conform to law; to regard higher powers with respect.
5. ACQUISITIVE desires: joy of ownership.
6. CREATIVE desires: pleasure of being a power or a cause capable of creating or destroying.
7. AESTHETIC desires: enjoyment of the beautiful.

Though God has integrated these desires into our personality, yet they are the very targets of Satan's keenest temptations. Let it never be thought that Jesus, as Man, did not experience every one of these desires. Certainly, the incitements to sin came to Jesus from without; nevertheless, appeal was made to what truly existed within Him. It seems that the tempter can pit one or two of these desires against each other and against other desires in such an unshakeable combination that we become confused about which way is right! (See Ro. 7:13-25)

How often perfectly good attitudes and desires are so close to sinful desires and a godless mentality! Here is another reason why we have such difficulty steering a straight course through life. Compare the following short list of good traits that Satan can twist into vices:

Caution and prudence is so often close to cowardice and indecision.

Belief taken without sufficient evidence becomes credulity.

Agreeableness and tact are often mistaken for compromise and falsehood.

Concentration of one's devotion may become just bigotry or fanaticism.

Confidence may swell into cocksureness and presumption.

Contentment oversleeps into self-satisfaction and appeasement.

Frugality and farsightedness struggles with miserliness and greed.

Humility could devolve into blind submissiveness.

Righteousness when praised nurtures hypocrisy.

Tolerance of too much becomes indiscrimination.

Curiosity about the affairs of others becomes meddling and nosiness.

An inquiring mind, when it refuses to know, becomes agnostic.

Broad-mindedness is close to spinelessness, too often without strong convictions.

But resolution is near to stubbornness.

And bravery or fearlessness is nigh unto folly and foolishness.

By taking advantage of the natural needs expressed by human desires, Satan makes his allurements appear harmless. What often makes a temptation so attractive is the list of apparently excellent reasons for going along with it. The only true safeguard against this confusion is to seek to know and obey God as our deepest desire and highest joy. Perhaps the most enlightening spiritual exercise to discover our vulnerability to temptation is simply to ask ourselves what we desire. Here are some problems for reflection that will help one see himself as temptation's target:

1. What is the **ONE** compelling loyalty, interest or desire of my life?
2. What one goal am I seeking to accomplish with my life?
3. What or where is the true treasure of my heart? For what do I spend the most of my money? my leisure time? my conversation among friends?
4. How do all my other basic desires align themselves with the one basic motivation for my life? Or, how may these be subordinated to it when conflicts arise?
5. In my social relationships, whose praise do I seek?

Other questions might be helpful. But, in the light of these suggested, it is seen that the problems in resisting temptations and solving conflicts of interest involve all that makes us men. This is why sin is not a single act unrelated to what we are. This is also the reason why conversion to Jesus cannot be reduced to a mechanical five-point ritual, but must mean the commitment of every thought and desire to obedience to Him:

B. *Some Lessons to be Learned:*

1. There are two viewpoints to every trial or temptation.
 - a. Temptation by allurements for evil purpose to ensnare in evil;
 - b. Putting character to the test for the purpose of proving its mettle.

(Study the following passages to see how both viewpoints can be very closely interwoven into the fabric of the same temptation, even if one or the other viewpoint will be more clearly in evidence: Mt. 6:13; Lk. 8:13; Jn. 6:6; Ac. 20:19; I Cor. 10:9-13; II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:1; I Th. 3:5; I Tim. 6:9; Heb. 11:17, 37; Jas. 1:2, 12-14; I Pet. 1:6; II Pet. 2:9.)

2. *How temptations are offered or presented.* Just as the temptations of Jesus were many-pronged, appealing to the fleshly appetites, to His moral character and to His spiritual perception, even so our daily allurements will be many-sided, attacking at once the body and soul by driving one to the limit of endurance, while keeping the other off balance by uneven stresses and strains. Satan is not so stupid as to put people on their guard by coming to them boldly and telling them that what he is about to suggest will be sin. Rather, he begins subtly and reasonably to prepare the mind for seduction. He must first corrupt the principles before his real purpose can be made clear. Once the confidence of the victim is gained and his desires excited, the enticement is presented in its most appealing form to that particular person. Satan repeats his approach, varying his emphasis, until the victim falls.

3. *Why man must be tried or tempted.* If there were no choice, no power nor pressures to do evil, we could not have any moral victory over evil, nor would we have that proof of character that is obtained only by self-control under fire. We must win the victory over Satan, not by never having fought him during temptations, but by overcoming him in actual combat. Precious promises are offered to those who overcome (Rev. 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 11, 12, 21) and victories the order of the day for the people of God (I Jn. 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4, 5; II Cor. 2:4).
4. *The dangerous deceitfulness of temptations.* The inability to see the sinful implications hidden under pages of good reasons for our indulgence of any desire does not remove that sinfulness. It is the devil's most practiced art to present wrong as right, pleasant, popular. He can also raise so many doubts about right actions as to make them appear to be wrong and worthy of all condemnation. The most frequent problem to solve as one faces temptation is to recognize it as a temptation. If he does not see what could be wrong about a particular action, he may justify that act for himself and be satisfied with his justifications. However, failure to sense wrong in a thing does not change God's condemnation of the sin involved. Since temptations, in their very essence, are wrong courses of action deceitfully disguised as right actions, we must learn to recognize them for what they are. How? We must avail ourselves of God's means.
5. *The way of victory over temptation:*
 - a. Jesus conquered by COMPLETE RELIANCE UPON GOD'S WORD. God has given revelation of great principles which govern ALL of our basic decisions, although He has not revealed specific prohibitions of every minute misdeed we might dream up. Our responsibility is to know these principles (II Tim. 2:15, 25, 26; 3:14, 15), practice them by daily meditation and actual experience, in order that, when specific temptations call us to violate these great, far-reaching prin-

ciples, our first and almost automatic reaction would be, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? (I cannot!)" (Gen. 39:9b)

- b. By UNHESITATING REFUSALS. If we wish to be done with temptations, we must get rid of the tempter! Jesus fought him honorably and victoriously, then commanded him to leave. Likewise, we must put up a stiff fight, but in the same way as did Jesus. Satan is no match for the firepower available to one man who trusts God! (See Jas. 4:7; I Pet. 5:8, 9; Eph. 6:10-18) We must reject without hesitation any evil suggestion. Sometimes flight is just as honorable as fight (I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 2:22, 23; I Cor. 6:18; 10:13, 14), as in the case of Joseph (Gen. 39:12), if flight means resistance to temptation by refusing any longer to listen to the tempter's appeals to our desires. It may also mean choosing, by means of a strategic retreat, the ground upon which the battle shall be fought. Some men need to stop facing a particular temptation until they have fled to the Father's side for instruction, encouragement, warning and strength, before continuing the battle.

Contrast the reasons given for the failure of those who are overcome by temptations. They turned away from listening to the truth, choosing teachers that suit their desires (II Tim. 4:3, 4). Ever listening to anybody, they can never arrive at a secure knowledge of truth (II Tim. 3:7). All along they have been following their own desires which they let deceive them into thinking they possessed the true, happy life (II Pet. 3:3; Jude 16, 18).

6. *We are not the only ones tempted.* Just as Jesus did not wrestle with Satan to gain the mastery only for Himself, but also for us, even so we must keep our mind on others in our striving against sin in ourselves. This will help us to be wary of our own susceptibility to sin, when we reach out to help those who are sorely tempted (Gal. 6:1, 2). Further, our God-given freedom to do many things that some would consider wrong or forbidden might tempt them to join us in the enjoyment of those freedoms which their conscience does not permit them. In this case, their

conscience is violated, since they had doubts. Thus, they are condemned for sinning against their conscience and it is our fault! (Cf. Mt. 18:1-14; Ro. 14:1—15:7; I Co. 8; 10:23-33) We are, with every one of our fellow men, waging this warfare against Satan, so let us not be their devil to tempt them by what we do (cf. Mt. 16:23) but, rather, let us provoke them to love, faith and good works! (Heb. 10:23-25)

Section 8

JESUS PREACHES IN GALILEE

(Parallels: Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:14—5:1; John 4:1-45)

TEXT: 4:12-17

12. Now when he heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee;
13. and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali:
14. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying,
15. The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, Toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles,
16. The people that sat in darkness saw a great light,
And to them that sat in the region and shadow of death,
To them did light spring up.
17. From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What influence does human activity or human weakness have upon the plan of God, as realized in the ministry of Jesus? (Cf. Mt. 4:12; 8:34; 13:58; Mk. 1:45)
- b. Why do you suppose Jesus left Nazareth and dwelt in Capernaum at this time? Why should He choose to leave His own hometown?
- c. In what sense is the ministry of Jesus to this area the bringing of "light" to them? How were they "sitting in darkness"?
- d. What is the essence of the kingdom of God?
- e. What does Jesus mean by "repent"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now after John was arrested and imprisoned by Herod, the report of the incident reached the ears of Jesus. Another factor enters to account for what follows: when the Lord knew that the Pharisees were aware of His ministry and that He was making and His disciples were baptizing more followers than John, Jesus left Judea. He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. Jesus decided that He had to pass through Samaria. Coming to Sychar, He declared Himself to be Messiah to a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. She, in turn, called the attention of the entire city to Him. That two-day revival in Samaria caused many Samaritans to conclude that Jesus was indeed the Savior of the world. (Jn. 4:5-42)

After the two days, Jesus departed for Galilee. At this point, He Himself testified that a prophet is not appreciated by His own people. But when He came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him, for they had seen all that Jesus had done in Jerusalem at the feast, since they too were there. Jesus' reputation spread through all the surrounding country. He taught in their synagogues to the great admiration of everyone.

Next, Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee where He healed the son of a Capernaum nobleman by "remote control." (Jn. 4:46-54)

From Cana He went to Nazareth where He had been brought up. On the sabbath, He went into the synagogue, as was His practice. There He read Isaiah 61:1, 2 and preached a sermon on that text, that got Him thrown out of the synagogue and of Nazareth. (Lk. 4:16-30)

Leaving Nazareth, Jesus settled down at Capernaum, a lakeside town located on the northwestern shore of Lake Galilee in the ancient territorial divisions of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. Jesus' move to Capernaum resulted in the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1, 2, which reads thus:

Land of Zebulun and Land of Naphtali,
 The Land of the Road by the Sea, and beyond the Jordan,
 With Galilee of the Gentiles—
 The people that were living in darkness
 Have seen a great Light,
 And, for those who were living in the land of the shadow of death,
 A Light has dawned.

It was from this period that Jesus began to proclaim the message of God's good news, saying, "This is the time; the kingdom of God is almost upon us! You must repent and believe the good news!"

NOTES

I. GOD'S GRACE GIVEN TO GALILEE

Upon first reading of Matthew 4:11, 12, the distinct impression is received that Jesus' withdrawal into Galilee follows hard upon His victory over the tempter in the wilderness. However, let it be remembered that Matthew does not pretend precise chronological order for his narration, and it will not be surprising to learn that the following succession of events carries the full story:

1. Ministry of John the Baptist: Mt. 3:1-12; Mk. 1:2-8; Lk. 3:1-18; Jn. 1
2. Baptism of Jesus: Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-23
3. Temptation of Jesus: Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12, 13; Lk. 4:1-13
4. First Acquaintance with early disciples at Jordan: Jn. 1:35-51
5. Wedding Feast at Cana in Galilee: Jn. 2:1-11
6. Change of Residence to Capernaum: Jn. 2:12
7. Cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem at Passover: Jn. 2:13-22
8. Early Judean Ministry—miracles, teaching, baptizing: Jn. 3:22, 4:1, 2
9. Teaching Nicodemus in Judea: Jn. 3:1-21
10. Arrest of John the Baptist: Mt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14a; Lk. 3:19, 20
11. Departure for Galilee through Samaria 8 or 9 months later: Mt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14a; Lk. 4:14a; Jn. 4:3, 4
12. Samaritan Woman and Samaritan Revival: Jn. 4:5-43
13. Beginning of Galilean Campaign: Mt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14a; Lk. 4:14, 15; Jn. 4:44, 45
14. Nobleman's Son of Capernaum healed, Jesus at Cana: Jn. 4:46-54
15. First Rejection at Nazareth: Lk. 4:16-30
16. Return to Capernaum: Mt. 4:13-17; Mk. 1:14, 15; Lk. 4:31
17. Call of Four Fishermen: Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11

With this chronologically harmonized outline for comparison of the Gospel accounts, it becomes much more comprehensible why Jesus should decide to withdraw into Galilee at this time.

John the Baptist had unmasked the Pharisees and Sadducees for the hypocrites they really were. His popular appeal galled them at first, then, alarmed them. Then came this Jesus of Nazareth into their stronghold, the temple, challenging their position. He drove out of the temple courts their profitable sources of revenue and He openly questioned their righteousness. Besides these attacks, He wrought many miracles in the Jerusalem area (Jn. 2:23; 3:2), and began gathering such a following (Jn. 2:23) that the more intimate disciples of John began to fear for their master's waning glory in the light of the ascendent popularity of Jesus (Jn. 3:26). What the hierarchy had perhaps secretly hoped would be a temporary manifestation of religious fervor is no longer to be regarded with disdain but genuine alarm. The movement seems to be growing to revolutionary proportions: Judea is excited.

At just this moment in the tension-charged atmosphere of Judea, one of John's sermons struck home to the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, Herod Antipas. John openly rebuked this petty king's flagrant immorality and gross violation of God's laws. (Cf. Mt. 14:3-5; Mk. 6:17-20; Lk. 3:19, 20) Herod could not tolerate this accusing finger pointed at his sins, nor could he permit this ground-swell of public sentiment to rise into a crescendo of national revolution (Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2). Perhaps John was handed over to Herod ("delivered up," see *paradidomi* in 4:12; Mk. 1:14a) by the Pharisees themselves. (Cf. Mt. 17:12; Jn. 4:1). At this crisis, i.e. **when Jesus heard that John was delivered up**, He made His move north.

He withdrew from what or whom? *Anachôreō* may be translated "go away, return, withdraw, retire, take refuge" (Arndt-Gingrich). If Jesus is seeking to avoid some impending danger, what is it? Certainly, Jesus could not hope for escape from a similar fate as that of John by His deliberate entrance into the political jurisdiction of Herod Antipas himself. Apparently, Herod's informants had not yet singled out Jesus as the new Leader of the growing reform movement, or else, Jesus had not yet launched the same condemnation as had John, and thus would not have been noticed and apprehended. Jesus could foresee those who would be His real enemies and so chose not to bring matters to a show-down at this time, for such a crisis could only end in a premature cross. Thus, rather than seek at once

the fullest notariety in the heart of Jewish world and provoke thereby the wrath of the religious hierarchy at Jerusalem (Jn. 4:1-3), Jesus chose the out-district of Galilee as the training and testing ground for those disciples who would establish the Church. He must yet train them in evangelism. Their false concepts of the Messiah and God's Kingdom must be corrected. The crisis of the cross must indeed come, but not yet. He must preach to the rest of the nation first. Thus, Jesus left Judea for several reasons:

1. John was imprisoned and Jesus wanted to maintain the momentum of John's labor and gather around Him John's lost, leaderless disciples.
2. The growing anxiety of the Pharisees needed to be cooled.
3. He already had a large following in Galilee (Jn. 2:23; 4:45).

Therefore, Jesus took the shortest, quickest route to Galilee, spending only two days in Samaria (Jn. 4:4, 40, 43).

Jesus came to Galilee: what genius! Though Galilee was not large, it had been uniquely prepared for His arrival. Galilee is that territory located in northern Palestine, bordered on the north by the heathen Syrians and Phoenicians; on the west by the plain of Accho and Mount Carmel; on the south by the half-breed Samaritans; and on the east by the Jordan River and Lake Galilee. The land area thus circumscribed was approximately that of modern Israel, north of Mount Carmel: about 60 miles long by 40 miles wide. Josephus (*Wars*, III, 3, 3) describes Jesus' countrymen thus:

The Galileans are inured to war from their infancy, and have always been very numerous; nor hath the country ever been destitute of men of courage, nor wanted a numerous set of them. Their soil is uniformly rich and fruitful and full of plantations of trees of all sorts, insomuch that it invites the most slothful to take pains in its cultivation, by its fruitfulness: accordingly it is cultivated by its inhabitants and no part of it lies idle. Moreover, the cities lie here very thick, and the very many villages there are here are everywhere so full of people, by the richness of their soil, that the very least of them contain above fifteen thousand inhabitants.

Jesus' tactical genius is seen in His choice of Galilee. Galilee's geographic and social relations as well as its religious history rendered

it particularly open to the reception of new ideas. The Galileans, because of their constant contact with the "outside world" of Rome, Syria, Phoenicia, could not be expected to be such sticklers for traditional orthodoxy as the Judeans. These inborn characteristics of the Galileans created particularly fertile soil for the new message of Jesus.

Jesus came to Galilee: what mercy and grace! He chose to labor among these despised Galileans of mixed ancestry, corrupted from purer Judaism by the liberalizing habits of surrounding heathenism. Before Jesus arrived, life seemed to be dominated by evil. Men existed without genuine hope or exalted purposes. All of religion seemed to be solely the possession of a few Judean Pharisees. But Jesus' entrance into Galilee shouts the joyful news to the mixed fragments of ancient Israel: "God's Kingdom is almost upon you! Evil is not the ultimate force in the universe; despair is not the final meaning to life; nor is death the last word!" Thus, God's grace was extended even to Galilee.

4:13 and leaving Nazareth. Though *kataleipo* ("leave") may be neutral, meaning simply a "departure from a place," yet it has the predominant flavor of leaving behind something or someone (Arndt-Gingrich). Had Matthew intended merely "departure," he had a wealth of words to say so (*aperchomai, metairō, apbiēmi, poreuomai, anachōreō, chōrizo, exeimi, chōreō, or metabaino*). *Jesus left Nazareth behind.* Although the words *Nazareth* and *Capernaum* are obviously geographical place names, yet Jesus' move is not without symbolical significance, and, considered the complete story of this move, these names suggest also the people who dwelt there. While Matthew does not spell out the reason for this seemingly normal change of residence to Capernaum (*katoikeō*), Luke tells the story behind it (Lk. 4:16-30). *Jesus left Nazareth*, thus, is no empty phrase, for He had faced the hard reality that a "prophet is not without honor except in His own country," (Lk. 4:24). Nevertheless, He had endeavored to speak to His own townspeople, but the more He revealed of His true identity, the more difficult they found it to believe Him. He did return later for one last time to try again to convince Nazareth, but she thought she knew too much to believe His claims (Mt. 13:53-58; Mk. 6:1-6). But, He must leave behind His hometown for now. This is another early intimation of the tragedy that will culminate

in Calvary. It was at Nazareth of Galilee that the Light had shined in the darkness, but the darkness could neither master it by comprehending, learning or understanding it, nor seize it with hostile intent to destroy it. (Jn. 1:9f) **He came and dwelt in Capernaum.** Even if Nazareth rejected her great opportunity to enjoy the great Light come to her and was content to sit in her darkness, yet other cities would receive the Light. The loss of Nazareth meant the gain of Capernaum. Jesus had already moved from Nazareth to Capernaum earlier (Jn. 2:12), but now He makes the latter city His headquarters for the Galilean campaign. That earlier move to Capernaum suggests that Jesus had already foreseen the Nazareth rejection and had already planned His ministry in Galilee long before going south to Judea for the Passover (Jn. 2:12, 13). Then the events in Judea merely triggered His plan.

Capernaum which is by the Sea. The ruins of Tell Hum, now generally identified as the site of Capernaum, lie on the north shore of the Lake. **Borders of Zebulun and Naphtali:** Capernaum actually lay in the ancient tribal territory of Naphtali (Josh. 19:32f), and near that of Zebulun (Josh. 19:10f); however, these old boundary lines had long ceased to divide the territories. Matthew uses these lines to draw attention to the prophecy which finds fulfillment in this zone which roughly corresponds to Galilee. (Study the following passages to appreciate the intimacy of Jesus' connection with Capernaum, that date from this move: Mt. 8:5; 11:23; 17:24; Mk. 1:21; 2:1; 9:33; Lk. 4:23, 31; 7:1; 10:15; Jn. 4:46; 6:17, 24, 59.)

II. GLADDENING GLORY GRANTED TO THOSE GROPING IN GLOOM

4:14 **that it might be fulfilled.** Jesus' beginning to evangelize Galilee was not with the malicious intent to produce a mechanical correspondence between His actions and the glorious prophetic predictions concerning the age of the Messiah. Jesus came north, not to fulfill messianic prophecy, but to save people. His move was prompted by loving mercy, by personal familiarity with Galilee and its people, and by events in Judea. As a result of His transfer to Galilee, the great messianic prediction of Isaiah 9:1-7 was fulfilled. Jesus, the "Light of the world" (Jn. 1:9; 8:12) completely fulfilled the prophecy as no prophet either before or after Him could have done. (Cf. Jn. 7:52 and Lk. 1:78, 79).

Isaiah's intention was to present a well-grounded hope to these provinces of Israel that, because of their geographical position as buffer-states, had suffered the greatest affliction and spiritual degradation. This people had suffered because of their false religious orientation begun when Jeroboam caused Israel to sin, because they corrupted themselves by imitation of the practices of their more "civilized" neighbors, because they trusted false gods and the false hopes these latter could offer, and because no complete return to whole-hearted worship of the true God, Jehovah, ever came about. Add to this religious tragedy the constant unrest that accompanies almost incessant war with the Syrians and the Assyrians. To this situation Isaiah addressed these words of hope. The geographic terms:

1. **The land of Zebulun and Naphtali:** see above on 4:13.
2. **Toward the sea:** (*hodon thalassês*) may be translated, following a Hebrew idiom contrary to Greek usage, "toward the sea" (Arndt-Gingrich). Literally, it is "the road by the sea" (Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, I, 244), and speaks of that tract of land on the western shore of the Galilean Lake.
3. **Beyond the Jordan:** Perea, as viewed from the west side of Jordan.
4. **Galilee of the Gentiles:** see above on 4:12.

In Jewish thinking, the only fitting place for the beginning of the glorious reign would be Judea with His capital at Jerusalem. The concept of a Galilean Messiah was to them a self-contradiction. (See Jn. 7:52. P 66 has the article "the," thus making reference to "the prophet" i.e. "the Messiah".) Galilee was the last place on earth a Jew of that period would choose for a similar purpose. The whole area was, according to the opinion of "enlightened Jerusalem," quite "in the dark" intellectually, morally and culturally. This latter was a position based upon quite unjustified personal pride on the part of the Judeans, whereas the language of Isaiah truly describes the actual position of the Galileans: *they sat in darkness and in the region and shadow of death*. The context of Isaiah (5:30; 8:21, 22) proves that this sad plight was self-inflicted, indicating the greater need for light. To Jesus, these were just good reasons why He should labor in Galilee!

While this passage is a graphic description of the conditions among the Galileans, it may also describe all men who try to live

without God. Compare Paul's masterful analyses: Ro. 1:18-32; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19.

Other passages which develop the theme of light and darkness:

Mt. 5:14-16; 6:23; Lk. 2:32; 8:16; 11:34-36; Jn. 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9, 10; 12:35, 36, 46; Ac. 26:18, 23; Ro. 2:19; II Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8, 13; I Th. 5:5; I Tim. 6:16; Jas. 1:17; I Pet. 2:9; I Jn. 1:5, 7; 2:8-10; Rev. 22:5.

III. THE GIST AND GENIUS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

4:17 **From that time** is to be taken with reference to Jesus' return to Galilee. Jesus now begins the thorough evangelization of Galilee. Matthew cannot mean that He is beginning for the first time to preach anywhere, for Jesus is just returning from Judea where He taught and wrought miracles (Jn. 2:13—4:3). Likewise, He passed through Samaria (Jn. 4:4-45) where He openly declared Himself to be the Messiah as well as where He accepted the open appraisal of His teaching as those of "the Savior of the world" (Jn. 4:42). Rather, Matthew intends only what he states; that when Jesus withdrew into Galilee, from that time He began to preach in Galilee. Prior to this time Jesus had not evangelized there; now He launches His "Great Galilean Campaign." Jesus' fame as a preacher dates from this campaign (Ac. 10:37), and His complete identification with Galilee from this move (cf. Lk. 23:5-7; Jn. 7:41, 52).

Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This is certainly Matthew's summary statement that boils down into a very few words hours of preaching and teaching done in Galilee. Yet, Matthew has not omitted anything essential:

1. With reference to God Himself, the GIST of His Government is His unquestionable right to command repentance of sinful rebels. Objectively, the gist of His government, or kingdom, is the inclination of men's repentant hearts to do His will. (See on 3:15)
2. The GENIUS of God's Kingdom that corrects all the failures of every human reign is the fact that it begins with the willing choice of the subject to be entirely transformed by His King. In God's Kingdom there must be no unwilling subjects.

Upon the imprisonment of John, Jesus sounds the same challenge and call to repentance that had been the heart of the Baptist's message (Mt. 3:2). Jesus does this partly to maintain the continuity of the movement which John had started, but not only so, for such a call for surrender to God's will is ever timely. To this well-known message Jesus adds a joyful, gladdening ring: "The messianic times are here! Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk. 1:15) Is it any wonder that the attention of all Galilee was riveted upon this Jesus of Nazareth? The ancient prophecies describing the nature of the messianic kingdom had kept the kingdom-idea before the people of Israel. John the Baptist had electrified the nation by announcing the nearness of this long-awaited era. Jesus took up the same cry, and, profiting from the keen current interest in the kingdom, successfully launched His great preaching ministry in Galilee.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List all of the events that occur between Jesus' temptations and His return to Galilee upon His hearing of the imprisonment of John. In other words, what happened between verses 11 and 12 of Matthew 4?
2. Does Matthew say that Jesus' return to Galilee immediately followed His temptation?
3. What are the two major causes for Jesus' sudden move to Galilee?
4. Where had Jesus been when "He withdrew into Galilee"?
5. What had He been doing there?
6. About how long had He been gone from Galilee?
7. Describe Galilee: its geographical position, size, sociological character, its probable religious preparation for Jesus' message.
8. What factors probably caused Jesus' transfer of residence from Nazareth to Capernaum?
9. In what ancient tribal area is Capernaum located?
10. Show the relationship between the prophecy quoted by Matthew and his use made of it: what is the context of the prophecy and how did it offer hope to the people originally addressed? How did Jesus fulfill it?
11. What was the content of Jesus' preaching at this time?
12. What do these expressions mean:
 - a. "Sit in darkness"?
 - b. "The region and shadow of death"?
 - c. "Great light did spring up"?

Section 9

JESUS CALLS FOUR FISHERMEN

(Parallels: Mark 1:16-21; Luke 5:1-11)

TEXT: 4:18-22

18. And walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers.
19. And he saith unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.
20. And they straightway left the nets, and followed him.
21. And going on from thence he saw two other brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.
22. And they straightway left the boat and their father, and followed him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How long do you suppose these four fishermen had known Jesus before He called them to be fishermen of men?
- b. What does Jesus mean by calling them to be "fishers of men"? What does He want them to do in that capacity?
- c. Why do you think Matthew emphasizes the immediacy of their response? ("straightway" of verses 20 and 22)
- d. How are the families of these working men to be supported if these four bread-winners leave their occupations to follow this itinerate rabbi over the countryside? Very likely, someone asked this question that day. How would you answer it?
- e. Vigorous efforts are being made to enlist the most capable young men for hundreds of promising vocations. Such efforts and the procedures used are generally approved or at least expected by the parents of these young men. Yet, when efforts are made to encourage these same young people to enlist themselves in the Christian ministry, their parents sometimes object strenuously to the "pressure" being put on their children. What is your reaction to the problem?

f. Apparently, Zebedee made no effort to hinder his sons' entering the discipleship of Jesus. What kind of man does this seem to indicate him to have been?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

One morning while Jesus was walking beside the Lake of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother, Andrew, throwing their cast-net into the sea, for fishing was their occupation.

On this same day, the people were crowding closely around Jesus to hear God's message. As He stood on the shore, He noticed that the fishermen had given up their fishing and had beached their boats, leaving them there while they washed their nets. Jesus boarded Simon's boat and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and continued His teaching the crowds from His seat in the boat.

When He had finished speaking, He addressed Simon, "Put out into deep water and all of you let down your nets for a catch."

But Simon argued, "But, Sir, we have been hard at work all night and caught nothing at all. But if you say so, I will lower the nets."

They did so and caught an enormous shoal of fish—so big that the nets began to break! So they signalled to their fellows in the other boat to come and help them. This they did, loading both boats so full of fish that they rode so low in the water that they almost sank. When Peter saw what had happened, he threw himself down at Jesus' knees, exclaiming, "Master, leave me, for I'm a sinful man!" For Peter and his companions, James and John, Zebedee's sons who were Simon's partners, were staggered at the haul of fish which they had taken. Jesus replied to Simon, "Do not be afraid, Simon. From now on your catch will be *men*."

So they brought the boats to shore at different parts of the beach. As Jesus stepped from Peter's boat, He invited Peter and Andrew, "Follow me and I will teach you how to take men alive!" They left their nets at once and followed Jesus.

Going on up the beach a little further from there, Jesus saw James and John aboard their boat with their father Zebedee, repairing the nets broken in places by the recent catch. Immediately He called them and, just as quickly, they left the boat, their father Zebedee, the hired servants—everything, and followed Him.

NOTES

I. THE MEMOIRS OF THE CALL

In the PARAPHRASE/HARMONY it is assumed that the incidents recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-21; Lk. 5:1-11) are basically the same event told from two quite different points of view. A simple comparison of the first two Gospels will indicate very slight variations in wording, whereas Luke describes a miraculous catch of fish, an event which concludes with the call of Peter and several fishermen to leave all to follow Jesus. It is quite possible that what is described in two ways is really two stories of two separate events. Matthew, according to his topical arrangement, places the call of the four fishermen in a general relationship of Jesus' entrance into Galilee; Mark does the same (1:14-20). However, Mark makes the event precede the "busy day of miracles" (1:21-38), whereas Luke (4:31—5:11) lists the call of the fishermen after it. Yet, Luke is not too precise about the time element, although his tendency is to follow chronological sequences. For this latter reason, it might well be asked whether Luke intends to tell the same basic event as the other two. Resolving this question involves letting the witnesses tell their story and our attempting to harmonize the facts they present, without our being able to cross-examine the witnesses. The importance of trying to solve the problem lies in the determination whether we have all the available materials at hand before beginning to interpret the passage, or whether we have too much material, putting together two separate events as if they were one.

There are at least two ways to harmonize the facts, if the story be one told from two viewpoints:

1. First, the call; second, the miraculous catch. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 476) argues for the first view, showing Peter's need for such a demonstration of Jesus' power to make him truly a "fisher of men." Peter heard it all in the boat, as he sat close by, in the shadow of His Majesty. Then, this was the teaching of which he had become a disciple; this, the net and the fishing to which he was just called. How utterly miserable, in one respect, must it have made him. Could such an one as he ever hope, with whatever toil, to be a successful fisher? . . . Presently it shall all be brought to light; not only that it may be made clear, but that, alike, the lesson and the help may be seen.

2. First, the miraculous catch; second, the call of the fishermen. There is good psychological reason for placing the miraculous catch first. In this case, Jesus is pictured as wanting to impress upon the minds of these fishermen the majestic authority of this One with whom they were to serve. In addition, providing them with such a large catch which they, in turn, could sell for no small sum, he could help them to justify their absence from home and business for a time. Further, the force of this miracle would not be lost on the people at home either, for their reluctance to permit these able-bodied bread-winners to forsake their occupation would disappear in the same confidence in Jesus to provide in the future, even as He did on this occasion of their call.

Therefore, the notes which follow take the general view that the Synoptics provide here merely two views of the same event. The sequence of action suggested here is that of the PARAPHRASE/HARMONY. The exact relation of the accounts in Matthew and Mark to that of Luke, however, must remain in doubt, inasmuch as the essentials are tenuous or missing.

II. THE MEN WHO WERE CALLED

4:18 **Walking by the sea.** Where Jesus has been, cannot be known with surety, due to the chronological problems in harmonizing the accounts. Perhaps this call of the four fishermen is the first intention of Jesus as He returns to Capernaum, from Nazareth; however, His fame precedes Him and a crowd gathers, following Him to the beach. Accordingly, although He saw the fishermen first, He taught the crowd before commanding these men to haul in the miraculous catch. **Sea of Galilee** is only a large lake, being only 6 miles wide by 12 miles long. It has probably been called a number of names by men caught out upon its boiling surface during one of its notoriously sudden, furious storms. The official names, however, have been "Sea of Chinnereth" (Josh. 12:27) probably from a fortified city that stood near its western shore (Josh. 19:35); "Waters of Gennesar" (I Macc. 11:67) or "Lake Gennesaret" (Lk. 5:1) from the small plain on its western side (Mt. 14:34); "Sea of Tiberias" was the name drawn from the prominent city of the NT period, located on its western shore (Jn. 6:1; 21:1). For further description, see on 8:23ff. The waters of this lake teemed with fish, thus providing food and employment for these commercial fishermen.

He saw two brethren . . . fishers. But what really did Jesus see? He saw men whose principle distinguishing characteristics were their being UN-distinguished in practically every regard. Any other's eye might not have seen in these men the sterling qualities that Jesus could discern there and later develop:

1. They were accustomed to hardship. Because of their experiences with the hard life, they were well-seasoned men.
2. They were humble men, capable of being taught. Their heads were not completely jammed with rabbinic foolishness to the point they would rather argue than listen and learn from Jesus.
3. They were diligent, working men, not ashamed of honest toil nor seeking the easy life.
4. They were already His disciples. Logically, Jesus sought for apostle-material among those who were already aware of some of His teachings, character and mission. Such a call as He would address to them could not have been made, unless they had something of this understanding. (See on 4:19)

Casting a net into the sea. Three modes of fishing are mentioned in the Scriptures:

1. Hook: Mt. 17:27; Job. 41:1, 2
2. Spears: Job 41:7
3. Nets, of which there are two principle types:
 - a. The Cast-net (*amphibléstron*) is a circular net which is thrown out over the water and allowed to settle down in the water, weighted down by lead weights fixed to its perimeter. The fish are thus entrapped in the center under the net as the fishermen tread down the net and draw the bottom edges together. Obviously, such a net would be that used by the men when Jesus first saw them near the beach (Mt. 4:18; Mk. 1:16).
 - b. The Dragnet (*sagéné*) or also (*dikturon*) is a long net, leaded on one edge with floats on the other edge which make it literally "stand up" in the water, producing a fence which fishermen may use to surround a school of fish by extending the net between two boats which bring

it close enough to shore that fishermen may land the catch in the shallows. If the water is deep, the boats can bring the ends slowly together to form a circle. A diver closes the bottom of the net and the entrapped fish are hauled out of the water and loaded into the boats. Jesus ordered the men to lower this net for the great catch. (Lk. 5:2, 4, 5, 6)

- c. The "nets" (Mt. 4:20, 21: *ta diktna*) probably indicates a general expression for all nets of whatever type.

III. THE MOMENT OF THE CALL

4:19 **And he saith unto them, Come ye after me.** The events which preceded this call and the circumstances in which it was given help to explain both what Jesus meant by what He said, as well as the reaction of the men to whom it was directed:

1. These fishermen had already been personally acquainted with Jesus for at least eight or nine months (Jn. 1-4), having both heard His teaching and seen some miracles.
2. The call came after Jesus' first open break with traditional religious authority and after the beginning of the persecution of Jesus by the Jews (Jn. 2:13-22; 4:1). Thus, Jesus challenged these men to enter into a formal fellowship with Him and His strained rapport with formal Judaism.
3. The miraculous catch of fish is also suggested as preceding this call. Plummer notes (145) that it frequently happens that one experience touches a man, when many similar experiences fail to do so. Yet, without being realized, they prepared the heart for that one experience that changed the man's life. These disciples had already seen some of Jesus' miracles, but this one struck home to them personally. The striking feature about this one was its relation to their daily toil: it was done with their nets and their boats. It is natural that it should make such an impression upon them.

IV. THE MEANING OF THE CALL

4:19 **Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.** What did Jesus intend these fishermen to understand by this invitation?

A. What Jesus did not mean:

1. This is not a call to become His disciples, for that they were already. He is calling them to learn evangelism.
2. This is not a call to worldly glory, for they were still to be, in some way, fishermen. What compensation did He offer them to leave all and follow Him? Apparently, He promised them nothing but the joy of righteousness and the satisfaction of servants of the Messiah. (Cf. Mt. 19:27) Only at the Last Supper did Jesus announce positions of honor in His kingdom in terms that approximated even remotely the language of compensation expected by self-seeking disciples. (Lk. 22:28)
3. Jesus is not causing them to vow never again to touch their nets, for they could certainly, without prejudice to their devoted acceptance of this call, earn a little occasionally at their old work. And they probably went fishing whenever Jesus remained in Capernaum. They still had to eat and support families. (Cf. Jn. 21:1ff)
4. This is not merely a call to learn more doctrine or better practice of already known truth, but a call to begin a completely new life of discipleship on a higher, vaster level than ever before realized in their acquaintance with Jesus.

B. What Jesus did mean:

1. **Come ye after me.** He wanted these disciples to be with Him! He wanted them to learn His spirit. His message, His ways. They had listened to Him before. They had seen Him in action. Until now they were relatively uncommitted to the movement He represented. But in this moment there came to them this challenge to throw in their lot with Him. Such a call could not come too soon, for these four and others were to be His witnesses. It would be their specific task to give to the world a trustworthy record of the Master's message and deeds. They must represent His character and mirror His spirit accurately. But to do this, their impressions of Him must be formed over long periods and under many, diverse conditions. But their following Jesus must also

mean the habitual abandonment of their former occupations and earthly ties whereinsofar these interfered with their acceptance of this call.

2. **I will make you.** They who become apostles of Jesus are not to be self-made men. He calls them to learn to evangelize by practical experiences, both by watching Jesus and by doing it themselves. Bales (166) quotes Weigle's beautiful description of Jesus' method of teaching:

"His training of the twelve was by life with them and for them. . . . Not content merely to teach them by word of mouth, He bade them follow Him. He gave Himself to them, and gave them work to do for Him. They went with Him in His journeys; they dwelt constantly in His presence. They helped Him preach His kingdom; they too worked miracles. He even sent them out for themselves, to travel throughout the land teaching and healing. He was preparing them to take His place and to carry on His work; and He prepared them thoroughly. They learned by doing. They caught His spirit by association with Him. Through knowledge, friendship and work He brought them to spiritual maturity . . . He was Himself the Ideal that He sought to teach."

What sheer, matchless courage Jesus must possess to speak these words to any man! He knew that the next few years would be spent not only in the public eye but under the closest scrutiny of these whom He calls to be His most intimate personal associates. Bales (*ibid.*) cites Stalker's observation:

"To the Twelve the most valuable part of their connection with Christ was simply the privilege of being with Him—of seeing that marvelous life day by day, and daily receiving the silent, almost unobserved impress of His character. St. John, reflecting on His three year's experience long afterwards, summed it up by saying, 'We beheld His glory!' . . . No eyes are so keen as those of students. If admitted close to a man, they take immediate stock of his resources. They are hero-worshippers when they believe in a professor. but

their scorn is unmeasured if they disbelieve in him. They can be dazzled by a reputation; but only massiveness of character and thoroughness of attainment can be sure of permanently impressing them."

How desperately they needed that molding which would be provided in the instruction and example of Jesus is best seen by contrasting what they were when Jesus called them with what they must be when He left them to return to the Father. The preachers of the Christian Gospel would have to have greater hearts than narrow, Jewish provincialism, freer consciences than those bound by traditional religion, greater intellectual attainment than that represented by the conventional learning of the day. They must learn to rejoice and triumph in the stumbling-block and foolishness of the cross. They must be willing to bear a cross themselves. But at the moment of their call to service what were they? They were the products of an environment made up of people who ultimately rejected and crucified Jesus. Obviously, they had much to learn and more to unlearn. They, like us, were slow to do both.

But the confidence of Jesus in His words, "I will make you," is contagious! Although there are some who will betray our trust, there are others who would respond to our confidence in them. How much more Jesus would be able to get out of His men simply because He showed them that, for all their weaknesses and failures, He could still trust them to the important task to which He called them! If Peter, for instance, feels the expanse of distance between Christ and himself as "a sinful man," because of a new sense of the Lord's holiness and majesty, he must have heard these confident, comforting words of Jesus as great encouragement to believe that the result of his ministry and life was in the hands of Jesus.

3. **Fishers of men.** Out of these three words grows that magnificent task which forms the book of Acts! He was calling them to the glorious honor of saving souls from death and establishing a Church that would march across the Mediterranean world conquering men's hearts and which would endure to the end of time.

V. MOBILIZATION TO THE CALL

4:20, 22 **And they straightway left the nets . . . the boat and their father, and followed him.** Did not these stalwart brothers comprehend the implications of this call to their family, friends and acquaintances? Yes, Peter later expresses the clean break that they had made, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." (Mt. 19:27a) But who would take care of Peter's family in his absence? Possibly a near relative, too old to attempt active campaigning with Jesus, could handle the fishing business well enough to justify the absence of Peter's hands at the nets. Hired servants stepped into the place of James and John (Mk. 1:20).

But, why did they follow Jesus that day? A. B. Bruce (*Training*, 16) rightly denies that these men were either idle, discontent with their former lot, or ambitious:

"Ambition needs a temptation: it does not join a cause which is obscure and struggling, and whose success is doubtful: it strikes when success is assured, and when the movement it patronizes is on the eve of its glorification."

Considering how little they really understood of the nature of the King in whose service they were enrolling themselves, or of the kingdom that they would proclaim, one would say that they were enthusiasts. For the moment, at least until Jesus could teach them better, their heads were pounding with visions of a glorious messianic kingdom about to be set up with Jesus wearing David's crown. These visions, immature and ill-conceived as they might have been, drove them from their families and occupations to go into the service of Jesus. Though it appeared that they left on a fool's errand, yet, with all their misconceptions and ignorance, it was into JESUS' hands that they placed their strength, their influence, their lives. They were just ordinary folk who gave themselves to Him and He can do anything with people like that! What faith to follow the unknown Jesus of Nazareth!

Whatever became of those men and that enthusiastic decision? Look up these passages, for they tell the heart-warming story of their discipleship: *Peter and Andrew*: Mt. 8:14; 10:2; 14:28, 29; 15:15; 16:16-23; 17:18, 24ff; 18:21; 19:27; 26:33-75; Mk. 5:37; 11:21; 13:3; 14:29-72; 16:7; Lk. 8:45-51; 22:8; Jn. 1:40-44; 6:8, 68; 12:22; 13:6-9, 24, 36; 18:10-27; 20:2-6; 21:2-21; Acts 1-15; Gal. 1:18;

2:7-14; I, II Peter. *James and John*; Mt. 10:2; 17:1f; Mk. 1:29; 5:37f; 9:33; 10:35f; 13:3; 14:33; Lk. 5:10; 9:54; 22:8; Ac. 1:13; 3:4; 8:14; 12:2; Gal. 2:9; Rev. 1:1, 9; 22:8; the Gospel of John, I, II, III John and Revelation.

Behold the glorious, surpassing wisdom of Jesus. He chose fishermen to change the world! He ever chooses the foolish to confound the wise. (I Cor. 1:18-31, esp. vv. 26-28) If Jesus can make such everlasting good use of such humble instruments as these four fishermen, dear friend, what can He do with your life when surrendered to Him?

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Name the four fishermen.
2. The father of James and John was _____; the father of Peter and Andrew was _____.
3. Did Peter and Andrew live in Capernaum? (Cf. Jn. 1:44)
4. What were the fishermen doing when Jesus first saw them?
5. At what time of day approximately did Jesus approach them?
6. What did Jesus ask Simon to do?
7. Why did Simon do it?
8. Had these men known Jesus before? If so, when or how long?
9. What did Jesus ask all the four fishermen to do?
10. What did He promise or predict concerning them?
11. What inducement did Jesus offer them to justify their leaving all to follow him? Did Jesus mention any compensations? What was the motivation that caused this sudden, clean break with one occupation to take up that of following Jesus?
12. The four "forsook all" and followed their Master. (Lk. 5:11) Did the "all" in any case include wife or children?
13. Tell all you know about each of the lives of the four fishermen, their past, their work with Jesus, their families, their service as leaders in the early church, and, if possible, their death.
14. What is the significance or importance of Jesus' calling these and other disciples to be with Him from this point of time on? Or, why must the choice of certain disciples to be with Jesus be made early in His work? (Cf. Ac. 1:21, 22)
15. Describe a typical fishing trip of the four fishermen, telling how they used their boats, nets, their hours for fishing, their methods.

Section 10

JESUS PREACHES AND HEALS IN GALILEE

(Parallels: Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44)

TEXT: 4:23-25

23. And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people.
24. And the report of him went forth into all Syria: and they brought unto him all that were sick, holden with divers diseases and torments, possessed with demons, and epileptic, and palsied; and he healed them.
25. And there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judaea and *from* beyond the Jordan.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Matthew introduces this obviously general summary into his account at this point?
- b. What does this section indicate about the nature of Jesus' popular ministry?
- c. If Jesus wanted to start a new religion, why did He begin in the Jewish synagogue? What good could be accomplished by beginning this way? What is the connection, if any, between classic Judaism and religion of Jesus?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus went all over Galilee, as He continued teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of God's approaching reign, curing every disease or malady that was among the people. His reputation spread even throughout the whole territory of Syria. Sufferers from every kind of illness or torturing disease, racked with pain, those possessed with demons, the epileptics, the paralyzed—they were all brought to Him and He healed them! Countless crowds of people followed Him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from Transjordan.

NOTES

I. THE EVANGELISTIC EFFORT

4:23 **And Jesus went about in all Galilee.** With these three verses Matthew summarizes the first general tour of Galilee, of which the chapters that follow may be specific incidents. Jesus apparently made three such evangelistic tours of Galilee in the effort to win its populace: this one, another after the onset of unbelief (Lk. 8:1-3), and a third just before the collapse of His popularity (Mt. 9:35—11:1).

Though Matthew does not record it, Mark (1:35-39) and Luke (4:42-44) both tell what significant preparation Jesus made before embarking upon His first great evangelistic campaign. After a busy day of great popularity, preaching and prodigies, Jesus arose early the next morning to pray alone. Peter's words of rebuke and anxiety only served to heighten the temptation to satisfy all the wants of His townspeople at Capernaum, "Everyone is looking for you." A synagogue full of expectant and admiring people eager to listen might have satisfied the ambition of many a rabbi. Yet Jesus has other plans and goals to reach: "Let us go elsewhere into the other towns that I may preach the good news of the kingdom of God there also; for that is why I was sent." Jesus' eye was on the nation, not upon that small-town excitement which had turned the heads of His disciples. His mission was not mainly or simply humanitarian! His mission was redemption! His was not to one small city, but to the whole flock of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The natural compassion of God within Him for suffering humanity caused Jesus to minister to their bodies. But His miracles were intended to point the mind beyond the acts themselves. He intended that these miracles should function as signs of His identity and prepare their minds for His message (Jn. 5:20; 10:24, 25; 14:10-14). They must see that through this Man God is compassionately and mercifully working in their midst and that the message of this One was that of God! How often these signs were misunderstood may be gathered from outstanding examples such as Capernaum, who, ironically, here wishes to keep Him from leaving her (cf. Mt. 11:20-24).

teaching in their synagogues. For a full treatment of the subject "synagogue," see under standard Bible reference works, especially Edersheim's detailed descriptions (*Life*, I, chap. X). Jesus could not have chosen a more logical approach to the Jewish people than through

the synagogue, for this was the most important institution in the life of His people, with the only single exception of the temple. Though some teaching was possible in the temple (see, for example: Jn. 5:14ff; 7:14—10-18, 22-39; Lk. 19:47, 48), yet the synagogue was unquestionably the institution essentially adapted for teaching. Further, the liturgy of the synagogue was such that it furnished Him the opportunity that He could best utilize for starting His formal public teaching. The ruler or president of the synagogue could invite to speak any person whom he judged to be qualified. Thus, at least at the first, there was an open door to Jesus in any town large enough to have a synagogue. Then, after Jesus had taught a particular lesson, there would have been time for discussion of the new doctrine He brought, for questions, for talk and fellowship with Him. (Illustrations: Lk. 4:16-37; Mk. 1:21-28; Mt. 12:9-14)

Those Christians who tend to reject various human inventions as unworthy of Christian practice or consideration on the ground that they are without divine approval should ponder our Lord's acceptance and use of the synagogue. The synagogue has no proven origin prior to the Babylonian captivity in which it arose out of a felt need for worship of God in a strange land. Certainly, true worship had to be rendered Jehovah at Jerusalem in the temple and at the stated feast-days and hours and in the appointed way. Yet the more devout Jews, living in captivity and having no sanctuary, altar or priesthood, felt the need to hear the word of God and pray together. And even after their return from exile, they continued their synagogue practice even in Jerusalem where stood first Zerubbabel's temple and later Herod's temple at which all the Mosaic sacrifices were offered (Ac. 6:9; Jn. 2:13-20) and where all the services were kept. The synagogue as an institution served mainly for a local tribunal as well as school house for elementary education. However, worship, in the sense of prayers and reading of the Scriptures, developed into a regular "service" or liturgy before the time of Jesus. In this human invention, brought into being without demonstrable divine sanction or prohibition, Jesus and His apostles participated by using to the full the opportunity it provided not only for proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom, but also for their own personal worship. Obviously, they would continue this latter only as long as their good relationship to Judaism remained intact. With the gradual disintegration of those ties that began during Jesus' ministry and continued until the ultimately necessary mutual separation

of Judaism and Christianity as well as the establishment of a distinct, Christian worship, the frequenting of the synagogues became less and less.

While Jesus knew that at Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship God (Jn. 4:19-22; cf. Dt. 12:1-14), yet, by His apparent approval and usage of the synagogue, He indicates that the mere fact that a thing—a project, a tool, an aid, an instrument, a means—has no particular divine sanction or prohibition, is no good argument against its use. He ever laid the emphasis on the manner and motives for which a thing is used. The synagogue could NEVER be used as a substitute for the temple. The two existed side by side in Jesus' day and He worshiped BOTH at the temple at the stated feasts AND at the synagogue. (Cf. Lk. 4:16) For Him the synagogue did not pose a choice between itself and the temple, for worship at the temple was God's clear command. At the same time, He worshipped and taught in the synagogue, because it was a most logical and practical means of giving witness to His reliance upon the law and the prophets and His example taught the importance of practical, weekly devotion to God by praying with God's people.

Further, the influence of the synagogue-plan upon the formation of the Christian congregation after Pentecost cannot be overlooked. Inasmuch as the synagogue had been so much a part of the culture of the apostles, it should not be at all surprising that they should utilize its basic form of worship and government when they established the Church. Rather, it perhaps would have been more surprising had they not done so, although Jesus could have instructed them in a completely different form of worship and government. The fact that He did not should cause His disciples to re-evaluate their acceptance or rejection of things not either prohibited or sanctioned in God's word.

For more direct information on the synagogue, see standard reference works and the following suggestive scriptures: Mt. 6:2-5; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:6, 34; Mk. 1:21-29, 39; 3:1; 5:22-38; 6:2; Lk. 4:15-38, 44; 6:6; 7:5; 8:41; 11:43; 12:11; 13:10; 20:46; 21:12; Jn. 6:59; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2; 18:20; Ac. 6:9; 9:2, 20; 13:5, 14; 41:1; 15:21; 17:1-17; 18:4-26.

preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing.

Matthew summarized Jesus' activities in such a way as to express perfectly His true purposes, as declared by the Lord Himself (Mk. 1:38; Lk. 4:43):

1. Jesus came to reveal the MIND of God. He defeated man's ignorance and corrected his misunderstandings.
 - a. Not about the universe or the world in general, for man could learn this on his own, given enough time.
 - b. But about the true knowledge of God, man was in gross ignorance. Jesus came to reveal what man could not have found out by himself. Decisively He puts an end to all groping and guessing about God by revealing Him!
 - c. And man had a lot to learn about the true nature of himself. Man is at his very best as servant of God, as a subject of God's kingdom: this is that for which God planned man, not for self-rule or self-satisfaction. He revealed God's will for man.
2. Jesus came to reveal the HEART of God. He conquered man's heart by demonstrating the Almighty's loving concern for man, by healing his diseases. This was very important:
 - a. Man, writhing in pain or tortured by a lingering illness, finds sermons about high morality and noble ideals quite unconnected with his personal, painful reality. He might ask himself, "What does God care if I waste away here on this bed of affliction?"
 - b. Then, Jesus mercifully touches the man's affliction, heals his body and opens the man's grateful heart to the message of the kingdom. Now the man is ready to listen and respond to Jesus.
 - c. Matthew lays a proper emphasis on this healing ministry by mentioning both the great variety of healings that Jesus accomplished as well as the widely scattered areas from which people came to be healed.

II. THE EXTENSIVE EFFECTIVENESS

4:24 The report about Him went forth into all Syria.

It is not easy to establish the exact bounds of *Syria* in Jesus' time nor the exact use Matthew may make of the term. In OT times Syria had been the small country just north of Palestine. But following the conquests of Alexander the Great and the Maccabean period,

Syria had come to mean the whole area from Egypt clear up to the Orontes River and Antioch.

Note how Luke in the parallel (4:44) uses the word *Judea*, not in the sense of "the area around Jerusalem," but in the sense of "the whole country of the Jews" or "Palestine." He often does this. (Cf. Lk. 1:5; 7:17; 23:5; Ac. 2:9; 10:37)

Even if Matthew intends the smaller region, obviously the fame of Jesus is travelling like a prairie fire. Certainly there were Jews living in Damascus (Ac. 9:2, 20-22) and in Antioch (Ac. 11:19), whose business and family connections kept them in touch with Palestine. Besides, the regular caravan routes from Babylon to Egypt passed directly through Galilee and carried all the most interesting gossip great distances.

They brought unto him all those who were sick. Because of the mixed population of Galilee and the certainly Gentile population of Syria, it is incompatible with the merciful love of Jesus to think that non-Jews brought to Him should be turned away. (Cf. 8:5-13; 15:21-28; Lk. 17:11-18) **Sick with various diseases:** for specific cases, see 8:1-17; 9:18-31. Those **possessed with demons:** for examples, note 8:28-34; 9:32-34. For discussion of *demons and demoniacs*, see comments on 8:28ff. **Epileptic**, a later case: 17:15. **Paralytic** means any lame or partially or totally paralyzed person; specific case: 9:1-8. **And He healed them!** What glorious, un-failing power! There were none sent away, rejected due to failure: there were no incurable cases. There was no anxious waiting for weeks when Jesus touched those bodies.

III. THE ELECTRIFYING EFFECT

4:25 **Great multitudes followed Him.** What an eager, excited audience to whom His earth-shaking messages could be preached! He has their attention: their hearts are open. But where did these crowds come from? From all over Palestine, says Matthew. (See map)

Decapolis, is a name meaning "ten cities," which refers to the federation of ten independent city-states located all but one (Scythopolis/Beth-Shan) on the east side of the Jordan Valley. They were inhabited mostly by Greeks or Romans. Because they were completely independent of local rule, Matthew rightly separates them from the area "beyond the Jordan," although, logically and geographically, Decapolis was also beyond the Jordan.

ET CETERA

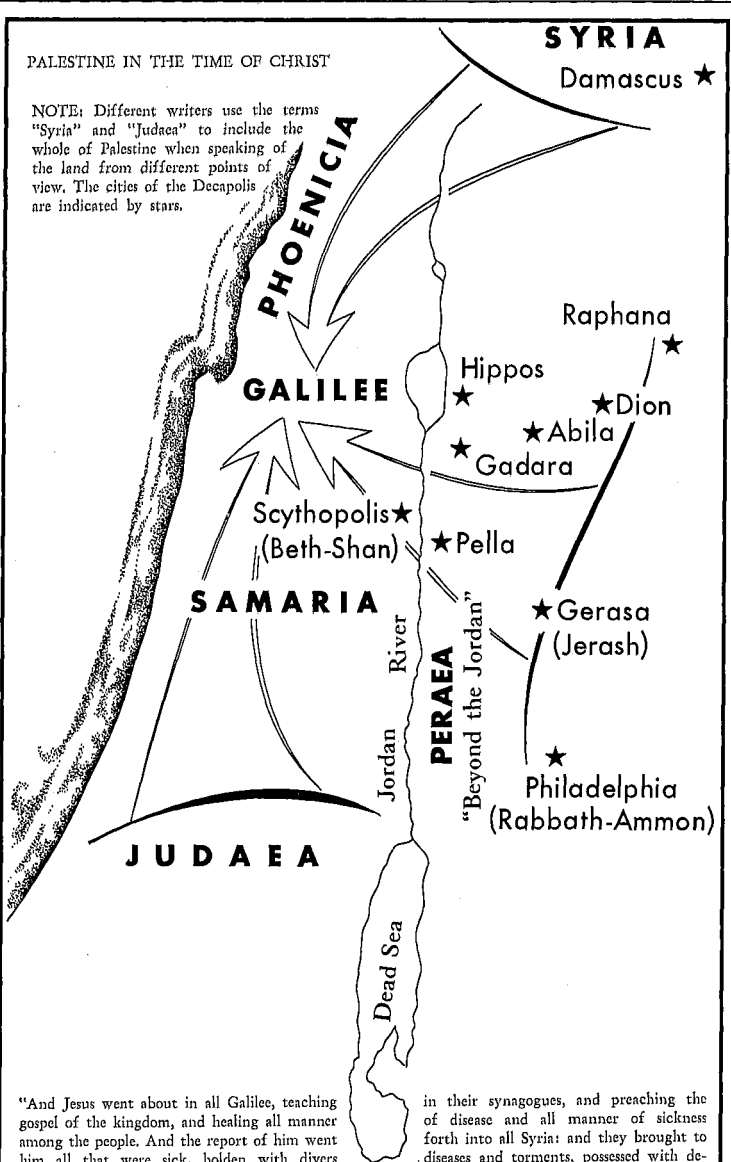
The sheer generality of this passage draws our attention to the all-sufficiency of Jesus. He can meet man at any point of his human experience, at any physical crisis, at any spiritual condition, and save him! Matthew's swift summary also gives another impression: Jesus is keenly interested and especially drawn to the "et ceteras" of human existence. Without doubt there were in these vast assemblages individual wrecks who had lost all hope, all self-esteem, all love. Yet, Jesus had time to deal gently with each one! Whether they were strangers, foreigners and sinners of every sort mattered not to Jesus, for he loved them and mercifully welcomed each one. To Jesus, the nobody was really somebody whom He could love, heal and save. Thank God for such mercy! Most of us are nobodies, but in Jesus' eyes we have value. Who would dare fail to respond to such a Master as He?

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the following words or phrases in the text:
 - a. holden
 - b. divers diseases
 - c. torments
 - d. demon possession
 - e. epileptic
 - f. palsied
2. What events are recorded in the parallel passages as having occurred just prior to this first general tour of Galilee?
3. According to the parallels, how did Jesus prepare Himself for this extensive evangelistic effort?
4. Of what value was the Jewish synagogue to the ministry of Jesus? What opportunities did it provide Him?
5. Tell something of the nature and use the Jews made of their synagogues.
6. What was the obvious purpose for which Jesus was sent, as revealed in this text and its parallels?
7. What effect did this evangelistic tour have upon the nation?
8. Locate the different areas whence people came to be healed by Jesus.

PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF CHRIST

NOTE: Different writers use the terms "Syria" and "Judaea" to include the whole of Palestine when speaking of the land from different points of view. The cities of the Decapolis are indicated by stars.



"And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner among the people. And the report of him went him all that were sick, holden with divers demons, epileptic, and palsied; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judaea and from beyond the Jordan."

in their synagogues, and preaching the of disease and all manner of sickness forth into all Syria: and they brought to diseases and torments, possessed with demons, and there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judaea and from beyond the Jordan."

Matthew 4:23-25

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER FOUR

"THREE TERRIFIC TEMPTATIONS" (4:1-11)

Introduction: Importance of Jesus' temptations at this time in His life just before He began His ministry: He stood to gain or lose control of Himself, His miraculous ministry, His relation to the Father, and, finally, the world He had come to win. His temptations and His victories can teach us something about ourselves, our temptations and how to overcome. Let us see these three terrific temptations from three points of view:

I. AS SATAN PRESENTS THEM:

- A. Self-interest: making provision for a personal passion, appeasing animal appetites, "all that the body longs for."
- B. Sensational: satisfying a scriptural scruple by spectacular stunts, "all that entices the eye."
- C. Success: the glittering glamor of gold and glory; "the glamor of all that men think splendid."

II. AS JESUS EXPOSED THE TEMPTATIONS:

- A. FAITHLESSNESS: a distrust of divine dependability which was nothing more than a rash recipe for rescue.
- B. FOOLISHNESS: a presumption upon paternal protection.
- C. FORFEITURE AND FAILURE: fawning for fictitious favors while ignoring the implications of idolatry.

III. AS WE TOO MAY OVERCOME THEM: using Jesus' methods, we must conquer

- A. By unwavering reliance upon God's Word, for in it He has given
 - 1. His revelation of Himself—His Nature, His Character, His Will.
 - 2. His unfailling promises to bless and sustain us
 - 3. His threatened punishment of sin
 - 4. His provision of a Savior
- B. By unhesitating refusals of the forbidden desire.
- C. By so loving others that we cannot bring ourselves to sin against them. By loving not our own lives, pampering our desires or even seeking our own ends.

CONCLUSION: We ought not be "taken in" by any temptation. Why?

1. Because we have in God's Word the standard of truth, by which we may measure every judgment in the world of personal relations. Such a measurement must render immediately clear the true and the false in every situation of life.
2. Because we have also seen the exceeding deceitfulness of sin. Hence, we should be morally armed by the knowledge of the strength of the enemy whom we must face.
3. Because we have Jesus' perfect example that proves for every man that Satan is not invincible.

Therefore, what we do with any temptation is clearly up to us. But our decision bears with it eternal consequences. Our only safeguard is constant loyalty to God, making use of His divinely-appointed means of combat.

DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

From your memory of the scripture text of Matthew's first four chapters, locate, identify and explain the following passages. Give all the relevant facts, that is, tell who said it, when, where, to whom, why. Are there any parallels in the other Gospels? Are there any variant manuscript readings of this passage, or significantly different translations? Tell as exactly as possible the true meaning or intended point of each text. Tell at least the problems involved in trying to interpret and apply each passage, if there are any, and try to solve the problems.

1. "It becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."
2. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."
3. "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel . . ."
4. "Out of Egypt did I call my son."
5. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
6. "Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance."
7. ". . . he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and *in* fire."
8. "The people that sat in the darkness saw a great light, And to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did light spring up."
9. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."
10. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness . . ."

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SOME NOTES INTRODUCTORY TO
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

FOR WHOM IS THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT INTENDED?

Jesus laced this message with open declarations and not-too-hidden suggestions of His absolute authority and deity. He promised blessings, breathed warnings and encouraged faith, all on the basis of Who and What He was. Those non-believers or shallow disciples who were in His audience would receive no encouragement from His words, if they did not accept the always present, underlying premise which gives coherency to His words: His right to say what He was saying. Jesus is not merely passing out deliciously sweet propaganda pieces, palatable to any and every appetite. In fact, there is much in the Sermon that is quite unacceptable to those who still think they have a right to judge Jesus by picking and choosing from among His teachings. A simple test might quickly demonstrate this truth: ask some out-spoken admirer of Jesus, who pretends to base his ethics on the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, whether he considers the "other cheek policy" (Cf. Mt. 5:39) to be a valid ethic for the modern age. Or, listen for his description of those whom he considers to be well off in this world. If he differs with Jesus, he is placing himself above Jesus by retaining the right to reject the Lord's authority. Point him to Jesus' conclusion to the Sermon.

Certainly Jesus addressed His words to those whose light of faith had only begun to burn and, consequently, needed intelligent attention. On the other hand, Jesus needed to reveal the nature of true righteousness, even if its high standards threaten to discourage the beginner's faith. Again, He must be so crystal clear that such grand concepts as He must deliver shall be accessible to the simplest follower and yet forever high enough to challenge the most advanced disciple to keep climbing. Addressing hypocrites who confided in their own goodness, He must unmask them, leaving them no cover.

Just because His "disciples" (cf. 5:1; Lk. 6:17; Mt. 8:1) were in the majority does not mean that the Sermon must have meaning only with reference to them. To be sure, the life techniques He describes are meant only for those who accept His point of view and way of thinking, but the infinitely high morality He demands is intended to bring the smug and self-satisfied to their knees, crying, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" Thus, Jesus left the door open

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to all who would enter the kingdom of God, while frankly letting the worldlings know what they could expect to find under God's rule.

IS THIS THE SAME SERMON AS RECORDED BY LUKE?

Plummer (*Luke*, 176, 177) has already plumbed the question to its depth and his fine observations are worthy of notice:

1. The relations between the two discourses will never cease to be discussed, because the materials are insufficient for a final decision . . .
2. Any preacher repeating a carefully prepared sermon would begin and end in the same way, and would put his points in the same order . . .
3. Nor does it follow that those portions which Luke gives as having been uttered on other occasions were not also uttered as parts of a continued discourse . . . The fact that Luke meant to record these other occasions may have been part of his reason for omitting the similar words in this discourse.

For the purposes of this study, we will be using them together as one sermon to be commented upon, in order to draw attention to all that Jesus said and meant upon a subject raised. If they are really two different sermons, they are yet for each other the finest of parallel passages.

THE DEITY OF CHRIST IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Here are some suggestions for further study, which indirectly imply or openly state that unique relations that Jesus of Nazareth shared with the Father, a relation that was shared by no other man. If Jesus be the final, once-for-all revelation of God, these important details, which form an integral part of the Sermon on the Mount, lift it beyond the reach of those who would pick and choose from it those parts which please them or which fit into their preconceived systems. Jesus' claims and implied authority, if vindicated by the proper credentials, give Him the right to reveal what man could not discover by the exercise of his reason or of his sense or by testimonies from the wisdom and experience of the ancients. Thus, those who would think themselves wise to reject certain portions of this Sermon are basically rejecting Jesus, for His importance to humanity is wrapped up in what He said and did. But what did He say?

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1. *Jesus demonstrated an absolute authority greater than Moses.* (Cf. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34). "You have heard what the Law of God said to the fathers, but I say to you . . ." Moses could not pretend any authority but what he received from God, while Jesus speaks with an authority that is inherent in His being and essential to His nature. His was a standard greater than that of Moses (5:48), because He went straight to the heart of the man, converting that first, and did not judge merely outward acts. His judgments upon man's heart are more far-reaching than any law, which punishes only external sins, ever could be; hence, Jesus exercised an authority greater than any law-giver. But Moses' law was given him by God; so, when Jesus raises the standards, He presumes to put His hands upon God's law? Those wide-awake critics in His audience who heard these words cited above, must have been rocked back on their heels as they exclaimed, "Who does he think he is? That is God's law with which he is tampering!" That is exactly the right question, since its answer must be: "He must think that He is God, for only God can change the law!"

2. *Jesus demonstrated a knowledge of things that only God could know for certain.* (Cf. 5:3-12; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 32; 7:11, 21) He knew with absolute assurance exactly what God would do when man seeks to do things Jesus' way or else when he refuses to do so. With unerring foreknowledge of final outcomes, Jesus explains what sort of life really leads to true happiness. He lays bare the futility of hypocrisy, because it cannot reach any goal beyond immediate applause.

3. *After picturing the heart of man as He sees it, He boldly declares Himself to be the Judge of the world (7:21-23) upon whose word the eternal fate of men depends (7:24-27).* The Master expressed Himself in such a way as deliberately to separate Himself from the human race, even though elsewhere He identified Himself with it in other ways. (e.g. Jn. 5:27) In the Sermon, Jesus never refers to God as "our Father" but always refers to Him as "your heavenly Father," with the single exception when He spoke of God as "my Father" (7:21) with such force as to distinguish Himself as the Judge of the ages. (The cases of "your Father" are 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11. The only "our Father" is the address to a prayer for use by Jesus' disciples, 6:9).

4. *Jesus' own sinless life underlies the ethic He presents for the imitation of others.* Though He preaches moral perfection, there is not even the slightest hint of a confession of personal weakness or

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failure. For instance, were Jesus conscious of any sin, only the basest hypocrisy could have allowed Him to proclaim Himself the very fulfillment of the law and prophets. (5:17)

5. Jesus puts persecution in His name on the same plane with that suffering known by those mighty men who spoke for God. (5:10-12) The prophets were persecuted for their devotion to God; Christians are to endure it because of their devotion to Jesus. The implication is clear: *Jesus is identifying service to Him with service to God.*

6. *Jesus claims that His words are the Rock upon which the life can be securely built to withstand any tempest.* (7:24-27) Upon Jesus you either make or break yourself, for He is the great stone of stumbling and rock of offence (Isa. 8:14) and the crushing stone (Lk. 20:17, 18) or else the chief cornerstone (Isa. 28:16; cf. I Pet. 2:3-8). How are we to understand Paul's interpretation of the mighty Rock in the wilderness? (Cf. I Cor. 10:1-4 with Dt. 32:3, 4, 15, 18, 30, 31)

Indeed, how could Jesus, with almost every breath, presume in one way or another to be the Son of God, the world's Savior and Judge and infinitely superior to the greatest lawgiver and somehow quite separate from the rest of the race, without incurring the charge of madness in the extreme, were He not what He pretended to be? Were Jesus the Son of God, He could not properly speak with less authority than that which is essential to His nature. Examining therefore each of the above suggestions or declarations of Jesus' deity, one is led to the single conclusion, consistent with His entire life and vindicated by His super-natural credentials, that He was indeed God come in human flesh to reveal the mind of God. (Remember Jn. 1:1-14, 18; 3:11-13; Heb. 1:1-3)

At this point, the admirer of Jesus must make a moral decision:

EITHER he must reject Jesus for having violated His own ethic by deliberately pretending to be what in fact He was not. For in this case, His moral precepts are corrupted, just as the source pollutes all that flows from it.

OR he must accept Jesus' moral sanity and render Him the worship due only to God. He must obey Jesus, finding in Him perfect consistency between the doctrine He taught and lived, and His claims as vindicated by His mighty acts.

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JESUS' PURPOSE FOR PREACHING THIS SERMON

What is Jesus trying to accomplish by preaching this message? Usually, the best way of determining what an author or speaker meant to achieve is to listen for his own declaration of intention. But in the case before us, this method fails us, since Jesus does not expressly declare His design. So we must search among His words and what few historical circumstances are available to us, to ascertain His motives.

Among the historical circumstances there is seen a definite need for such a sermon as this. At this point in Jesus' ministry it is becoming urgently important that Jesus define His ideals and objectives to correct the hazy, confused or mistaken concepts of His followers. With regard to the concerned, confused and jealous religious leaders, He must declare His basic position and indicate His plans. He must relate Himself to "the law and the prophets."

Among His words, certain ideas keep repeating themselves from various angles. He makes passing references to "the kingdom of God" (5:2, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21) and to "righteousness" (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33). Another great emphasis is the recurring use of the expression "your Father" (5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 3, 6, 8, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11), which, like a symphonic melody keeps singing the love of God and invites the disciple to come alive to this royal relationship. And, more than by mere allusions, He describes the true nature of righteousness and its infinite importance to entrance into God's kingdom. The composite sketch that emerges from Jesus' bold, swift strokes is that of an ideal disciple or a man saturated with the Kingdom point of view. The first two chapters of the Sermon are dedicated almost entirely to Jesus' discussion of man's heart, his attitudes and his motivations.

Out of this information arise two questions:

1. Is Jesus forecasting who would really be happy in His messianic kingdom, in such a way as to attract those whose hearts were truly seeking God's will and, at the same time, repel those who would not really want to submit themselves to His rule? There are many who would not be happy in Jesus' service even if they could get into it. Is Jesus describing *what kind* of man will really find fulfillment?
2. Or, is Jesus laying down conditions for entrance into the kingdom, or perhaps, listing some of the requisite qualities which

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must characterize every citizen of the kingdom? While inquiring sinners are not referred to any declaration of this sermon as a term of pardon (Cf. Ac. 2; 8; 9; 10 etc.), yet most of the Beatitudes point to the only frame of mind in which a man can be converted to the Lord. Further, all of Jesus' language contains descriptions of the true righteousness, which His interpreters, the apostles, worked into requisites for vital power and joy in the kingdom.

The Master is probably doing something of both. However, there are several distinct goals that He is NOT at all trying to reach, goals which many of His expositors have mistaken for His goals.

I. JESUS IS NOT PRESENTING AN ETHICAL CODE WHICH MAY BE DIVORCED FROM HIS DEITY AND CONSEQUENT AUTHORITY TO COMMAND THESE IDEALS.

Some individuals and organizations feel that they can replace the Church by incorporating the teaching of the Sermon into their philosophy without a necessary belief in Jesus or a significant loss of moral vigor to reach these ideals. It is to the disgrace of the Church that they do sometimes practice some of these principles more consistently than do they who belong to Christ. There have been great men who have served humanity, who were full of altruistic and self-giving service, and who come from different, if not opposite, religious dogmas. The world, on the basis of its acquaintance with such men, is inclined to suggest that the ethics of Jesus' sermon could also be extracted from its religious context and be practiced with just as much meaningful success as those great non-Christians. The great damage done to Jesus' ethical standard by those who share this opinion is that they try to apply Jesus' teaching to society *en masse*, rather than to the converted individual, as did Jesus. Any attempt to apply the standards of Christian holiness to any society other than Christian individuals serves only to destroy the standards and fail in the attempt to apply them to the world in general, and reduce Christianity to a harmless theory unworthy of further serious consideration. Such a use ignores Jesus' wisdom and His capacity to reveal the proper viewpoints which direct suffering humanity's steps to the true happiness.

The frame of reference in the Sermon is that of saints who have surrendered their will, emotions, intellect and conscience to Jesus as Lord and Master of all of life and, thus, they share the Kingdom point of view. The Sermon is directed against all "wise" men of

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earth who would praise Jesus as "reformer," "great teacher," "man ahead of his time," and yet would unashamedly reject His deity on subjective grounds. These are but damning Him with faint praise, if they stop short of His DEITY! Recall how Jesus handled Nicodemus when that learned doctor called Him "Teacher come from God." Jesus challenged whether that night visitor actually received Him as the revealer of God or not! One can hardly read the lines of the Sermon without being ever conscious of the divine authority of the One who preached it. One cannot excise this theme without slicing the Sermon to shreds.

II. JESUS DOES NOT INTEND THE SERMON TO BE A FULL, FINAL REVELATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE.

The Sermon is not the gospel, for it has nothing in it about a redeeming cross or a risen Savior. Paul declares (I Cor. 15:1-4) that the essence of the gospels lies in what God has done through Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The religion of Jesus is a message of fact to be believed, not merely some ethics to be practiced. If a handful of rules scissored from three memorable chapters were the condensation of all that Jesus had to offer to mankind, why should He have had to go to the cross and endure that bitter rejection by His race? How much simpler it would have been to have returned immediately to heaven after preaching this Sermon! But this Sermon could not be the gospel: the death of Jesus for my sins is good news! May not Paul's warning (Gal. 1:8, 9) be interpreted in this fashion? "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than the redemptive act of Jesus, whether they bring the divine standard in the Sermon on the Mount or the Mosaic Law or whatever, let him go to hell!" Certainly, it is not the Sermon in you which is the hope of glory, but CHRIST in you. (Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:27, 28)

In fact, the Sermon is not good news at all. The more we study it, the worse news it becomes. Opening our heart to Jesus' words, we suddenly realize that we are hypocrites at best and unspeakably vile at worst. The Sermon examines the vile, impure heart of man in the light of God's holiness and that light is painfully bright as it searches out the exceeding sinfulness of man and condemns the darkness in him. To the outsider, this Sermon is LAW, law that is far more perfect than that of Moses, far more stringent, harsh and demanding. It is an ideal that must produce despair of attainment.

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But this is the very goal that Jesus means to attain. Only when man is broken by that perfect standard will he be willing to come to Jesus for healing and filling. For the insider, the disciple, it is not law in the sense of a code to be legalistically or heartlessly applied. It is, rather, a vivid description of the new type of human nature which will arise in us, even though the Sermon itself does not touch upon the exact method by which this nature comes into being. This latter task would be left to the apostles to accomplish. So it is not in any way intimated that Jesus had given a complete statement of His message in this one Sermon.

III. JESUS DID NOT PREACH A UNIQUELY NEW ETHIC.

Partial parallels have been thought to have been found to practically all His teaching in the writings of the Greek philosophers, the oriental thinkers and the Hebrew prophets. Granted this possibility, someone might draw the wrong conclusion that, therefore, there is nothing new or revealed by Jesus, and, as a consequence, we can do without Him, provided we follow all the sage precepts ever transmitted by Jesus and other men. No greater mistake could be made, for, as Edersheim (*Life*, I 526) observes,

The new teaching, to be historically true, must have employed the old forms and spoken the old language. But the ideas underlying the terms equally employed by Jesus and the teachers of Israel are, in everything that concerns the relation of souls to God, so absolutely different as not to bear comparison.

To this, Marshall (*Ethics*, 8) adds,

From the religious point of view, however, it would be disconcerting rather than otherwise if there were no parallels anywhere to the ethical insight of Jesus, for in that case we would have to conclude that, apart from Jesus, God had left Himself without witness. But where is the ethical teacher, in Greece, Palestine or India, who can supply parallels to that ethical insight *at every point*? The newness is to be found in the unique combination of ethical precepts which Jesus presents, a combination which has no parallel anywhere; it is not seen in particular exhortations but in the absolute intensity of His ethics. . . . Jesus supplied, not so much new ethical precepts, as a new *direction* to the ethical life

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of man, and invested it with a new *power*. His concern was not to formulate a new moral code but to lead men into such a new relationship with God that they would be endowed with power to do the good they knew.

If there be a unique freshness about the ethics of Jesus, it is to be found in its revolutionary approach to the usual problems which all ethical systems must touch, such as personal, family and social relations. The Lord drives home the absolute indispensibility of heart purity and thorough-going righteousness, as contrasted to mere concern with externals.

IV. NOR DID JESUS BRING ANOTHER LAW OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT.

As has been intimated above, the Sermon has the same effect as law to the non-disciple whose imperfection it cannot but condemn. The Master's demands for absolute perfection "even as your Father in heaven is perfect," are so rigid and exacting that worldlings and unthinking Christians reject Jesus and His ideals. Such Christians would deny their own Lord to be a Teacher qualified to reveal the mind of God concerning the true nature of man and righteousness, and they impugn His wisdom by criticizing His ideals as impracticable, either because they seem to be too exalted for everyday application or because they seem too unrealistic in a world ruled by force. But there are three inescapable facts which respond to this shallow reasoning:

1. Jesus offers unimpeachable credentials as to His identity and His right to reveal these standards which the unaided mind of man is incapable of originating and which he is unqualified to judge.
2. The objection that the Christian ideal is so lofty that human nature can never attain it is no argument that it is unusable or must be modified before it can be practicable. Jesus, while living in this human nature, did practice what He preached! By so doing He proved His ideals quite practicable to all who live in human flesh. Not only that but He also demolishes our fabric of self-justifications for our failures to measure up. (Ro. 8:1-4) Again, a man's ideals must always exceed his reach, else what good are ideals? Ideals, by their very definition, are needed to keep men morally sensitive, conscientious and stretching to reach the heights.

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3. But the religion of Jesus is not one of struggling up the never-ending stairway toward perfection, but one of taking the elevator of justification by faith, by which one arrives instantly at perfection imputed to him by virtue of his relation to Jesus. It is a religion of regeneration and arising out of death, burial and resurrection and of being empowered by God's own Holy Spirit. Of course, Jesus' teaching seems to be unworkable *by men as they are*, but He plans to remake them through conversion.

Everything Jesus teaches is impossible unless He can put His Spirit into us and remake us from within. Apart from Jesus, therefore, we can do nothing! (Cf. Jn. 15:5) Apart from Him, we cannot live these rules!

At the other extreme, there are people who completely undervalue the Sermon's ideals. Many a man thinks he lives the golden rule, for example, just because his philosophy is "live and let live." Some may imitate Jesus part of the way, for purely selfish reasons: "Honesty is the best policy—good for business, you know." Jesus did not intend that the blazing glory of His Light should be filtered down into a fifteen-watt slogan of rather harmless and dubious application. These show only a gross ignorance of what Jesus said and meant, for he who can study the Sermon without suffering distress of conscience had better reexamine his conscience. If the natural man can hear this Sermon without its producing despair in himself, either he has no conscience or else had paid no attention. If used as a Christian moral code without Jesus, the Sermon becomes the harshest of laws, condemning man and leaving him hopeless. That glib shallow assertion of the rich young ruler must be changed to: "None of these things have I kept from my youth up: God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Only Jesus can provide the power to reach these impossible goals.

The Sermon is not another rigid discipline like that of Moses. The Beatitudes, for example, express God's gracious mercy to the imperfect. Marshall (*Ethics*, 101) notes,

Jesus must never be regarded as a second Moses, a new Lawgiver, drawing up a code of rules to be rigidly observed by all His disciples. To think thus is to relapse into the very 'legalism' which He condemned. 'Instead of framing laws, He stated principles and made them so few and broad

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that no one could overlook them . . . Jesus' concern was not to 'legislate,' to prescribe rules and regulations for every situation in life (for casuistry was foreign to His spirit and genius), but to lead men into the Kingdom of God, that is, to bring men under the rule of God, freely accepted as the rule of God, freely accepted as the rule of their lives. . . . So the moral imperatives of Jesus are not 'laws,' they aim at making explicit the ethical ideals and principles which are implicit in that new relationship to God into which a man enters when the Kingdom is established within him.

V. JESUS INTENDED TO DESCRIBE RIGHTEOUSNESS

If, then, Jesus did not intend to reveal a novel, unique, ethical code that could be divorced from His authority, nor hoped to cram into these few words the whole Christian message, nor set up a law greater than that of Moses, of what value is the Sermon on the Mount to the disciple for whom it was intended? In what relation to these rules does the Christian stand? God loves us too much to let us go on with trashy ideals. Jesus came not only to save man but to reorient him toward new life ideals. Jesus wants to make man as beautiful as God wanted him to be when He first thought of him. He intends for us to take these rules as clues as to how those who count themselves as citizens of His kingdom will act. The rules are not the Law all over again, but they are rather the effect of Christ living in us. They are not the legal cause of a moral effect. The rules help us to guard against self-complacency which assumes: "I am good enough. I know enough. I love and give enough." The lessons of Jesus' Sermon lead us to the single conclusion that we must acknowledge that we are His DISCIPLES and that we must keep learning. Our Savior and God is still above, ahead and beyond us!

RADICAL REQUISITES OF REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

What is the essence of that righteousness which Jesus is teaching? What kind of character does His demand require? How does one get to be that kind of person?

A. *Not a daring demand of due deserts for doing duty*

True fellowship of God is enjoyed on the basis of faith in His mercy, not on the basis of the perfection, or any degree thereof, to which one might attain by keeping law. (See notes on 5:3, 7) The

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right way to keep law is to begin with a perfect knowledge of every area of its application and to adhere consistently to all of its requirements. This is why man just cannot be justified by law, since he starts out ignorant and forgetful, and, as an expected consequence, he cannot keep it consistently. Paul quotes several prophets with devastating effect:

There is none righteous, no, not one.
No one understands, no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong;
No one does good, not even one . . .
There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Ro. 3:10-18)

So, God has concluded all under the condemnation of sin, that He might show mercy to everyone.

Apparently, not even God Himself could write a law which at once would be a sufficient standard of righteousness conformable to His own character and at the same time be the standard which any (not to say, every) man could meet. Paul is not inventing a hypothesis contrary to fact when he declares, "Verily, if there had been given a law which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by law." (Gal. 3:21) So it was God's purpose, in giving His Law to the Israelites, to show for all time and to all nations the futility of trying to be righteous, or, to attain absolute righteousness, on the basis of law.

The basic failure of law to be a description of true righteousness lies in its tendency to standardize people at the same level of growth in righteousness, rather than to promote unlimited growth toward perfection. All that law can accomplish is list certain acts which ought to be the expressions of right attitudes. But how can any law truly regulate attitudes? For instance, how could Lev. 19:18 be applied or enforced by law? Law just cannot control character merely by limiting conduct; the character must be recreated from within. But the will of Christ describes an ideal so much higher than any human or fleshly standard that man might choose, that the soul instinctively cries out, "How can I get to be that way?"

B. *It is a dedication of desires*

True righteousness is a matter of motives, character, desires and attitudes as well as conduct. But some might ask, "If a Christian is not under law, how is he to be controlled?" Our conduct may be

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controlled by the slightest wish of Jesus, if our motives have been changed and our character regenerated. It then becomes sufficient to know what Jesus said and what He meant by it. As Christians, we have the benefit of all the instructions of Christ and His apostles, who revealed the very mind of God to us. Anything in the New Testament which illuminates the will or character of Jesus leads us, and it does not need to be stated in the imperative mood with penalties stated for disobedience. Thus, even without specific and detailed laws, we have a means of knowing what God would have us do. No law could ever have the authority for us as much as the gentlest suggestion from Jesus! Thus, it is quite mistaken to consider the new covenant writings, i.e., the New Testament, as a prison for curtailing the activities of the reborn man within the walls of a legalistic system. Rather, all that Jesus said, when applied in the spirit of Jesus (in the way He meant it), becomes both our highest control and our deepest motivation. If any church has to make laws for itself, it confesses its own failure to convert men to Jesus!

Those passages which seem to suggest that a Christian is somehow "under law to Christ" (I Co. 9:21), or guided by the "royal law, the law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25) or judged by it (Jas. 2:8, 12) on the basis of failure to keep "the whole law in every point" (Jas. 2:9-11), are but illustrations of the *principle* of the need for salvation by grace and become a *description of the principle* which controls the Christian. They cannot be construed so as to contradict the great truth: "Ye are not under law but under grace." (Ro. 6:14) Paul (I Co. 9:21) means only that he is not without a principle of control as a Christian, but is simply controlled by Jesus; he cannot mean that as a Christian he is trying to be justified by law.

C. It has a dynamic drive for deeds and development

The real dynamic of true righteousness may be found in the implications of the following descriptive phrases:

1. Dead men cannot sin, because they are free from the reach of law (Ro. 6:3-11; Gal. 5:24) and, paradoxically, they must not sin, since their sinful desires died too. By dying, we have already accepted our own damnation and our release from that judgment.

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2. A new creature, reborn, regenerated from the dead (Gal. 6:15; II Cor. 5:17-19; Tit. 3:5; Jn. 3:3-5). Now we are not mere men because we have become Jesus Christ on earth. (Gal. 2:20; Ro. 8:9, 29; Eph. 1:22, 23)
3. Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Ro. 14:17)
4. Christ in you; every man perfect in Christ (Col. 1:27, 28); having the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1-11). A Christian sins, not against law for he is not under it, but when his thoughts and actions are out of harmony with the mind of Christ.
5. Fruit of the Spirit; no law against such character (Gal. 5:22, 23, 25)

According to Jesus, then, out of the converted heart of a regenerated man will naturally come those attitudes and actions which please God. Therefore, in His viewpoint, religion and ethics, worship and service, piety and deeds, or faith and righteousness must all be the same thing. Each of these ideas must express merely slightly differing viewpoints of the same thing, the product of regeneration in the heart. Jesus constantly refused to distinguish between them since there can be no double standard of worship offered God and service rendered mankind.

Real righteousness amounts to admitting that we do not possess it. If we are to be really righteous, we must admit God's righteous sentence against our sins and admit that our guilt deserves His condemnation. Further, we must recognize that our self-righteousness has kept us from doing His will. (Cf. I Jn. 1:8-10; 2:1, 2; 3:1-10). We must place our hope in Christ's victory and be released from the necessity of self-defence against a relentless legal code. In short, we must be saved by His grace, not merely by our knowledge of certain doctrines. Our faith is not so important in what it can do for God at this point as in what it is willing to receive from God. The righteousness that Jesus expects is not to be found, therefore, in merely outward circumstances or in external observances or even in the acts of religious service which we perform for God, but rather in the entire transformation of our character until it mirrors perfectly the character of God!

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THE REASONABLENESS OF THE REDEEMER'S
REWARDS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Is it a serious ethical defect in the teaching of Jesus that He offers rewards as inducements to faithfulness in His service? Jesus did not hesitate to guarantee the magnificence of the prize to those persecuted for His sake (Mt. 5:10-12), or the security of remuneration (*misthos*) to those who receive prophets, righteous men, apostles and little children for what they represent (Mt. 10:40-41; Mk. 9:41), nor does He shrink from threatening the faithless with a reward suited to them (Mt. 16:27; 10:28; 7:27). It is regarded almost as an axiom in the modern world that to associate the idea of reward with virtue is to fabricate a base, unworthy ethic. Is Jesus, by His mention of these positive and negative rewards, encouraging the idea that godliness is simply the best policy or that prudence dictates virtue, not for the sake of goodness, but for selfish ends arrived at by selfish calculation? Is "duty for duty's sake" and "virtue of no ulterior motives" the final statement of the only valid ethic?

While it is right to refuse to be enticed to be good by the hope of some present material bonus or to be blackmailed into a virtuous life by fear of some physical punishment, yet the mere mention of some reward or punishment do not thereby render unworthy an ethical system, since those who preach this doctrine of "duty for duty's sake" are seeking *some reward* in an appropriate amount of happiness insuing from their application. Otherwise, would they not cease to hold this opinion? An action by which nothing is achieved is futile, else good men would ask themselves whether any virtue were worth the effort. Let us examine Jesus' idea of rewarding faithfulness, to see the validity of His ethic for today's life. Jesus idea of rewards . . .

I. DEMONSTRATES THE FINALITY AND IMPORTANCE OF CHOICE
Marshall, citing Taylor, (*Challenge*, 204) notes:

It is the supreme assertion of the conviction that choice is real and that everything is staked on the quality of our choice. If happiness depends on character and character is genuinely made by our choice, we cannot refuse to contemplate the possibility that character, and with it happiness, may be lost beyond the power of recovery by sufficient persistence in choosing evil and sufficient indolence in choosing good.

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Indeed, the choice means everything! To every man Jesus freely and generously offered all the treasury of God on the condition that they choose to be His disciples. But His disciples are to be remade man, for, without His Spirit working in them, they would only be frustrated by His demands. Jesus has no fear that such a disciple would try to make a claim upon God for rewards proportionate to the man's piety, since, as far as the disciple is concerned, the need to put God in debt to him does not exist. Jesus' disciple stands in a different relationship to God: he has already been justified on the basis of his faith in God's grace. The choice of that new life and position before God is all-important, since it finally leads to ultimate happiness. Needless to say, its contrary is also equally true.

An adequate concept of grace must repudiate the suggestion that man can make a claim upon God for a reward calculated upon the basis of so much work, so much reward. Jesus' parable on the laborers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) warns the apostles specifically and all disciples in general against the wrong spirit involved in asking Jesus "What shall we have?" (Cf. Mt. 19:27). Jesus' intent is to place the apostles in positions of great honor (Mt. 19:28) and to bless richly any follower (Mt. 19:29). Such rewards as these are not exactly proportioned to the work done, but are established by the free choice of the Giver. The reward does have some relation to the work done, but it is received because God promised it, not because it is earned. Then too, there is the disciple's confession after he has labored to the very limit for his Master: "I am an unworthy servant: I have only done what was my duty." (Lk. 17:7-10) Note that only a disciple of Jesus could afford to say this, for those who have not chosen Jesus must defend their own righteousness as "a worthy servant."

Seeming exceptions to this rule, that the choice of salvation by grace rules out the necessity of this-for-that rewarding, are those verses which suggest positively (as, Mt. 10:41, 42; Mk. 9:41) and negatively (as, Lk. 6:37, 38) that man will be blessed or condemned "measure for measure." However, this rigid justice describes how God *could* act and not necessarily how He *will*. God is always better than His promises, but the disciple must not presume.

Rather than lay emphasis upon calculated or *quantitative* remuneration (so many good deeds for so much reward), Jesus confers *qualitative* rewards. The inducements which Jesus offers possess certain qualities that are perfectly suited to the character of the receiver, not

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quantities satisfying to his greed. Only highly moral and spiritually-minded people will enjoy what Jesus offers: the kingdom of heaven, consolation and courage, satiation with righteousness, the vision of God, the privileges of God's sons (Mt. 5:1-12), becoming truly great (Mt. 20:25-28), gaining one's own soul (Mt. 16:24-27). These are not the kinds of reward that appeal to the selfish and calculating. The question, according to Jesus, should be not "how much?" but "what kind?" Seeming exceptions to study: Mt. 19:27-30; the effect of the story upon the hearers: 25:14-46; I Cor. 3:8, 14, 15.

Further, Jesus' idea of rewards . . .

II. CONDEMNS ALL HYPOCRISY

How perfectly hypocritical is the sinner who hopes that he can be good enough often enough to "buy God," i.e. by doing a certain number of good deeds purchase those rewards that he could not otherwise expect. Were he starting from a solid base of impeccable righteousness, perhaps he might have been able to start earning, and thus put God in debt to him. (Cf. Ro. 4:4) But God has declared every man under the condemnation of their sins so that He might have mercy upon all. This is why Jesus scorned the popular pharisaic righteousness which would make God a debtor to some sinner because of his supposedly accumulated "treasury of merit." (Cf. Lk. 18:9-14)

Jesus soundly condemned all pious practices inspired by the hope of some immediate reward, for instance, the praise of men. These did not seek God's praise or reward, (Jn. 5:42-44; 12:42, 43) and so would not receive any more than they sought. He counselled men to do good to their fellows without expecting to receive some sort of recompense from them (Lk. 14:13ff; Lk. 6:27-38), for God rewards such conscious selflessness (Lk. 6:35).

Therefore, before Jesus may be criticized for offering an ethic which seems to glorify "virtue for ulterior motives," His abhorrence of hypocrisy must be weighed into the conclusion. He rewards no hypocrites who would serve God for ulterior motives!

Last, Jesus' idea of rewards and punishments . . .

III. SHOWS ITSELF PSYCHOLOGICALLY SOUND

While virtue at its highest is unconscious of itself, man rarely breathes that rarified air! The idealists may want man to do good for its own sake without seeking further reward, but this desire

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scarcely touches the common man as he actually is. To man as he is, a goodness which achieves no end beyond itself is meaningless and futile. God could require that men practice it, but He could be ill-assured of their doing so. But man is just not made that way. He responds most readily to desirable promises and refrains from doing those things which bring him the prospect of pain or punishment. It is to this actual nature of man that Jesus addresses Himself. It may be well for the idealists to wish that man were quite different so that they could rule no acts as having moral worth unless done freely out of an utterly uncalculating goodness of heart. Nevertheless, Jesus begins with man *where he is* and takes him where he ought to be. But how does Jesus propose to bring man out of all that is ignoble and corrupting in the world, and help him to become a partaker of His own divine nature? How does He arouse in us that courageous spirit that keeps trying to answer His call to His own glory and excellence? By knowledge alone? By some unreachable ideals only? No, He has granted to us His precious and very great promises that though these incentives perfectly adapted to our real nature we might be spurred to act rightly, that is, act ethically. (II Pet. 1:3, 4) Unblushingly, the apostles make the same appeal: "Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward." (II Jn. 8)

REVIEWING THE SERMON IN OUTLINE FORM

The Occasion: Jesus probably ordained the Twelve to be apostles (Mt. 5:1a; Mk. 3:13-19a; Lk. 6:12-16) and preached to a vast multitude (Mt. 5:1b, 2; Lk. 6:17-20).

Theme: "The Wise and Godly Man"

- A. The Character and Blessings of the Wise and Godly Man (Mt. 5:3-12; Lk. 6:20b-26)
- B. The Mission of the Wise and Godly Man (Mt. 5:13-17)
- C. The Relation of the Wise and Godly Man to the Law (Mt. 5:17-48; Lk. 6:27-36)
 - 1. His attitude toward the Standard (Mt. 5:17-20)
 - 2. His attitude toward Anger or Hate (Mt. 5:21-26)
 - 3. His attitude toward Lust (Mt. 5:27-32)
 - 4. His attitude toward Truth (Mt. 5:33-37)

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5. His attitude toward Personal Vindication (Mt. 5:38-42; Lk. 6:27-31)
6. His attitude toward Perfect Love (Mt. 5:43-48; Lk. 6:32-36)
- D. The Religious Motives of the Wise and Godly Man (Mt. 6:1-18)
 1. His basic motive (Mt. 6:1)
 2. His motivation for doing others good (Mt. 6:2-4)
 3. His motivation in prayer (Mt. 6:5-15)
 4. His motivation for fasting (Mt. 6:16-18)
- E. The Wealth and Worries of the Wise and Godly Man (Mt. 6:19-34)
 1. His attitude toward earthly treasurers (Mt. 6:19-21)
 2. His attitude toward his own dedication (Mt. 6:22-24)
 3. His attitude toward "the necessities" (Mt. 6:25-34)
- F. The Dangers Facing the Wise and Godly Man (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)
 1. The danger in harshly criticizing others (Mt. 7:1-5; Lk. 6:37-42)
 2. The danger in failing to discern important differences (Mt. 7:6)
 3. The danger in failing to recognize God's provision (Mt. 7:7-11)
 4. The danger of missing God's basic standard of conduct (Mt. 7:12)
 5. The danger of choosing the wrong way of life (Mt. 7:13, 14)
 6. The danger of being led astray by false prophets (Mt. 7:15-20; Lk. 6:43-45)
 7. The danger of self-deception (Mt. 7:21-23; Lk. 6:46)
- G. The Wisdom of the Wise and Godly Man in Obeying Jesus (Mt. 7:24-27; Lk. 6:47-49)

The *Impact* of Jesus' Message (Mt. 7:28—8:1)

CHAPTER FIVE

Section 11

JESUS PREACHES THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

(Parallels: Mark 3:13-19a; Luke 6:12-49)

TEXT: 5:1, 2

1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him:
2. and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you suppose to have been Jesus' impression of this enormous crowd of followers from near and far? (Cf. Mt. 9:36)
- b. What was Jesus trying to accomplish by preaching this message?
- c. Why would it be important for Jesus to make the bold, almost shocking statements that are seen in this sermon? For whom were these words intended? the masses? the religious leaders? the disciples?
- d. How do you think that each group would react to what He said?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus came down from the mountain top with His newly selected apostles and stood on a level place on the mountain where was a large concourse of His disciples and great numbers of people from Jerusalem and Judea and from the seaboard area of Tyre and Sidon. These all had come to listen to Him and to be cured of their diseases. Those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured; and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch Him, because power went out from Him and cured them all.

After He had taken His seat, His disciples came up to Him and gathered around to listen. He looked over His audience, opened His mouth and began to address them.

NOTES

5:1 **Seeing the multitudes.** Here is the Speaker sizing up His audience. Jesus had eyes that really perceived, for He was looking beyond the surface. He saw not merely a multitude to teach: He saw individual cases, real problems. (Give some thought to these

passages: Mt. 4:18, 21; 8:14, 18; 9:2, 9, 36; 14:14; Mk. 10:14; 12:34; Lk. 7:13; 13:12; 17:14; 18:24; 19:5; 21:1, 2) Onto what **mountain** in Galilee (Mt. 4:23; 8:5; Lk. 7:1) He went up, nobody knows, although it was quite possibly within easy walking distance of Capernaum, assuming that He healed the centurion's servant on the same day. His choice of a tall hill may have been to obtain the best acoustics for this open-air meeting. There are no true mountains in Galilee: there are many hills which could easily fit the idea of the Greek word (*oros*; see 5:14 where the same word is translated "hill"), none of which is over 3000 foot altitude. But since the area around the Sea of Galilee is 682 feet below sea level and the Esdraelon Plain of Lower Galilee lay at sea level or a little above, any tall hills in Galilee look like mountains.

5:2 **His disciples came to him.** This cannot mean that only His disciples heard the sermon, since there were **crowds** who heard Him through to the end (7:28). They were not merely a crowd of disciples, for there followed Him from the site of the Sermon "great crowds." (8:1; cf. Lk. 6:17-19) **When he had sat down,** as would any oriental teacher, probably upon some eminence clearly visible to the audience, His disciples arranged themselves on the ground at the Master's feet. **Opened his mouth and taught them, saying.** By means of this seeming redundancy, Matthew gives the distinct impression that he is recording one single address, delivered on a specific occasion. (Cf. 7:28—8:1) Yet, many scholars assume that he has collected here isolated sayings from many occasions, on the basis of the fact that Luke does record some of these remarks as having also been said under different circumstances. But let us permit Matthew, who was present (Cf. Lk. 6:15), tell his own story about what Jesus said, to us who were not there.

A. THE CHARACTER AND BLESSINGS OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN

(Parallel: Luke 6:20-26)

TEXT: 5:3-12

3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.
10. Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11. Blessed are ye when *men* shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus began this sermon this way?
- b. Why does Jesus describe this type of character as "blessed"?
- c. Is there any difference between the "Wise and Godly Man" and heathens who share some of these qualities? If so, what?
- d. What is the antithesis in Jesus' mind as He lists each of these qualities? This is one of the best ways to discover what He meant.
- e. What is the relationship between the salvation by grace of very undeserving sinners and the receiving of rewards on the basis of certain qualities one possesses, or on the basis of suffering for Jesus' sake? If a man is saved without any regard to his personal merits (Ro. 3:19-26; Eph. 2:8, 9) just because he accepted God's gracious offer, how is it possible to harmonize the idea of "rewards"?
- f. Why is it always a mistake to overestimate one's sense of worthiness? The Pharisees thought that **THEY**, if anybody, should be the first to enter the kingdom, due to their "obvious righteousness." But Jesus describes a character completely different from theirs. Where did they go wrong? (Cf. Ro. 12:3; II Cor. 10:7-18)
- g. Why do you suppose the meek, the gentle, courteous, unassuming people are usually more highly esteemed than the selfish, calculating status-seekers?
- h. In what way are the Beatitudes the description of an ideal Christian?
- i. Summing up the rewards promised in the Beatitudes, what is the great reward Jesus is promising? Would you say that this reward would satisfy?
- j. Is it possible for the natural man, that is, one who is not a disciple of Jesus, to be all that the Beatitudes require? How is it possible for the Christian to be everything that Jesus mentions here?

- k. Since each of the Beatitudes mentions an attitude of heart, how does Jesus intend that these Beatitudes shall be understood and applied?
- l. What are the real motives for my actions? Are there two motives behind each of my "good" deeds: the reason I want others to know, plus my real motive? What makes me do what good I do to others?
- (1) Is it hope for financial gain or reimbursement (Cf. Ac. 24:24-26; Lk. 9:57, 58)
 - (2) Is it applause, thanks or praise that I seek? (Col. 3:22; Jn. 5:44; 12:43; Lk. 17:7-10; Mt. 23:5-7)
 - (3) Love of self-display (III Jn. 9; Mt. 6:1-18; Lk. 14:7-11; 11:43)
 - (4) Maintaining my social respectability? (Mt. 16:1; 21:23; Lk. 14:12-14; Jn. 11:48; 12:43)
 - (5) To gain a sense of superiority over others who would not stoop to such a humble task?
 - (6) Self-righteous pride? (Cf. Lk. 18:9-14)
 - (7) Hopes of national glory? (Mt. 16:21, 22; Jn. 6:14, 15)
- m. Is self-defence or the defence of one's family, one's country or of a threatened portion of fellow humans forbidden to the peacemaker? Must the peacemaker allow the basest, most brutal men rule the world by beatings, torture chambers and mass execution?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"How well off are you who know that you are poor in spiritual things, as well as materially (Lk. 6:20): the kingdom of God is yours!

"How blest are those who know what sorrow means, because they are in a position to receive consolation and courage!

"Happy are those of a gentle spirit, who claim nothing of their own rights, for the whole earth will belong to them!

"Blessed are you who are hungering and thirsting for that character which is God's own righteousness: you shall be fully satisfied!

"How happy are you that weep now, for you are going to laugh!

"How blest are they who show mercy to others, for they will have mercy shown them!

"Happy are those whose hearts are pure, those who are completely sincere, for they shall see God!

"Happy are those who work to produce peace in human society, peace between God and man and peace with man himself: these will be known as God's sons.

"How blest are they who have suffered persecution for the cause of righteousness! The kingdom of God belongs to such as they.

"Indeed what happiness will be yours when men hate you and turn you out of their company, when you suffer insults and persecution, when they slander you and despise all that you stand for, because you are loyal to the Son of man! Accept it with gladness and rejoicing, for your reward in heaven will be magnificent. This is the way men persecuted God's spokesmen, the prophets, before your time.

"But alas for you who are rich, for you are in little position to receive further comfort! (Lk. 6:24)

"How miserable are you who have all you want, for you can only return to hunger! (Lk. 6:25)

"A curse on you who are laughing now, for you will learn sorrow and tears! (6:25)

"Woe to you when everybody is saying nice things about you, for that is exactly the manner in which their fathers treated the false prophets!" (Lk. 6:26)

NOTES

5:3 **Blessed.** In the introductory notes, see the special study: "*Jesus' Purpose.*" The word (*makarios*) denotes: "happy, blessed, fortunate" and connotes: "well off, thriving, prosperous, in good condition." Sometimes the word describes a pleasant state of feeling, on the part of the person thus described. But it will be seen that Jesus is talking about happiness from His ideal point of view. The conditions that Jesus represents as "blessed" are those which his listeners had always considered as "curses." Thus, He clearly intends to surprise and whet their interest with these unexpected lightning bolts from heaven. The beatitudes are paradoxes in that they declare as being truly well off the man who, from the ordinary point of view and perhaps in his own opinion, seems to be most unfortunate. But Jesus refers to man's true well-being which can often be opposed to his apparent well-being. This surprising opening of His sermon secured to Jesus the attention to the whole message! Though these beatitudes are flat contradictions of the common world view, they demonstrate themselves in actual practice to be unquestionably true.

In saying where true happiness lies, Jesus is not suggesting that either pleasure or pain are the true criteria of right and wrong. Rather He emphatically insists that the ultimate results of right-doing are ultimately pleasant, while those of wrong-doing are finally painful,

even though the intermediate plight of the godly man may be torment and trouble and the case of the wicked nothing but sumptuous comfort. These "blesseds" are another of Jesus' attempts to get man's eye off the glamor and glitter of this age that blinds him to the more concrete realities of the Kingdom of God in its practical aspects for this age as well as its promised delight in eternity. Jesus wastes no time: beginning by contradicting all points of man's basic philosophy, or world-view, He lays down the challenge, "Whose world is real?" He immediately marks Himself a blind fool, at worst, or an idealistic dreamer, at best, if He cannot really see beyond the limits of this epoch and declare with divine authority the true outcomes of the contradictory ethics of this world-life. While many of the beatitudes have present joys attached to them, yet most of them have double intent that reaches beyond this life. But flatly contradicting the common world-view, Jesus is announcing: "Only my world is real. That human world-view is mistaken which declares as happy the rich, the oppressors, the proud, the arrogant, the self-centered, the fully satisfied!" How beautifully James (3:13-18) makes this point!

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let his good life give practical proof of it by deeds wrought with the meekness born of wisdom. But if there is bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast or deny the truth, for this is not a wisdom that comes down from above. Rather, it is earthbound, physical (as opposed to spiritual) and diabolical. For wherever you find jealousy and selfish ambition, you will also have disorder and all kinds of evil practices. But, on the other hand, the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, rich in mercy and good fruits, straightforward and un hypocritical.

He merely seconds Jesus' remarks by stating that true wisdom lies in being everything Jesus described in these beatitudes.

From the first word of the beatitudes to the last resounding illustration, Jesus' message draws black-and-white contrasts between the true nature of the expected Kingdom and true righteousness, and the popular expectations and views arising out of the Mosaic system and the Pharisaic philosophy.

The most striking contrast with the Mosaic system can be seen by remembering how important the rite of circumcision is to any adequate concept of the system. (Cf. Ac. 15; Ro. 2:25-28; 4:9-12;

Gal. 5:3-6; Eph. 2:11, 12; Col. 2:11-13) But circumcision is completely ignored by Jesus as completely incongruous with the entire plan of God for His kingdom. No Jew could have imagined the Messiah's leaving out such a beatitude as: "Blessed are the circumcized, for no uncircumcized persons shall enter the kingdom of heaven." Not one external rite is ever brought forward. Jesus' silence is most significant.

But the most remarkable collisions occurred when Jesus' religion collided with the current views of the Pharisees. Before raising the standard of acceptable righteousness to the level of absolute perfection (Cf. Mt. 5:48; Ro. 13:8-10), far beyond "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees," Jesus pronounced as blessed at the very outset those who were not perfect: the spiritually bankrupt, the mourning, the humble, those hungering for righteousness. The Lord could just as easily have said, "BLESSED ARE THE SINNERS, for they shall see God, receive mercy, enter the Kingdom and be called God's sons." Such a beatitude, while completely expressive of the genius of Christianity, yet might have scandalized the audience because of its apparently contradictory nature. This beatitude shocks because it refutes all other religions which bless those fortunate few who have struggled up an endless number of steps toward perfection by the strength of their own moral energies. But Jesus, in blessing the imperfect, destroys all hope for the self-righteous. Here Jesus is teaching the doctrine most offensive and unacceptable to the world: "good men" are going to hell, but "wicked wretches" God can save! (Study Rev. 3:17, 18) A man is never so well off as when he admits to himself that he is poor, blind, naked, destitute and morally wretched, because only then can he learn what God can do with him.

Blessed are the poor, not only in spirit but also in purse! (Cf. Lk. 6:20) "Woe to you that are rich!" (Lk. 6:24) Jesus well knew that it would not be wealth as such that would hinder the entrance of the rich into His kingdom, but its religio-ethical effects upon their character. (Cf. Mt. 19:16-30; Mg. 12:41-44; Lk. 12:13-21; I Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19) But naked poverty as such does not automatically bring the destitute into the kingdom either. However, actual poverty, sorrow and hunger have real religious and ethical effects upon the poor, if they be taken as opportunities for the exercise of internal virtues. Jesus is not pronouncing a blessing upon an economic situation where people have not enough food to eat or are forced to live in slums. Rather, He encourages those in that

unfortunate condition to be assured that they ARE the objects of God's concern. Both Matthew and Luke emphasize this extreme destitution by not using the usual word for a poor man (*penês* or *penichros*) who is so poor that he must struggle to exist on his scanty daily wage. Instead they use a word (*ptôchos*) which may mean simply "poor," but commonly signifies "dependent upon others for support." It speaks of one deeply conscious of his need.

This opening salvo fired by Jesus at one of the most popular expectations of the Jews, that in the messianic kingdom all would be wealthy, must have dumfounded the audience. They had learned to think that wealth was the peculiar demonstration of God's blessing and favor. Here, however, Jesus is exclaiming, "The highborn, the wealthy, the privileged are not necessarily the favorites of God. Nor do they have first rights to the kingdom before others." Too often they are oppressors, exploiters, worshippers of mammon, proud, idle, vain, self-indulgent, self-centered, cruel and callous. (Note Jas. 2:1-7; 5:1-6) To those of this character God's Kingdom is closed! Even if genuinely good people, the rich have the temptation to put their wealth before their allegiance to Jesus. (Cf. Mt. 19:16-22) Here and there Jesus found a Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10), a Joanna (Lk. 8:3), or a Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57) who were willing followers, but more often than not the rich proved to be His enemies (Lk. 16:14) and oppressed His followers (Jas. 2:6; 5:1-6).

James puts this beatitude in these terms: "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flower of the grass he will pass away." (Jas. 1:9, 10) By putting it this way, James emphasizes the spiritual relationship of wealth and poverty upon man's spiritual welfare. This explains why Jesus said (according to Matthew), "Blessed are the poor **in spirit.**" The man who is really well-off in Jesus' estimation is he who knows that he is spiritually bankrupt. He has plumbed the depths of his heart and found nothing there that had any real value. This man has reached his own point of despair: he has realized his own utter helplessness. Only he can be helped who knows that mere things are quite incapable of bringing him happiness and security. How deep is the poverty of soul of the rich man when he must face the sudden realization that he has no treasure in heaven and is not rich toward God. But wealth tends to hide from the rich man his true spiritual condition to the point that he will never come to Jesus for the true wealth. This

explains Jesus' warning, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation, you have all that you are going to get!" (Lk. 6:24)

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is trying to GIVE away the Kingdom to those who want it on His terms (cf. vv. 10, 20). But His terms demand that all comers admit their deep spiritual poverty and their dire need of His wealth (Lk. 12:32-34), their need to start all over by receiving from Him (Jn. 3:1-5). This way, proud, self-righteous spirits would not be at all suited for the kingdom (Mt. 18:3, 4; Mk. 10:15). In fact, look who accepted the gospel: people who realized their destitute condition and were ready to listen to the Lord and accept His gracious help on His terms. (Cf. I Cor. 1:26ff) This is the beginning of faith and the power behind true repentance.

5:4 Blessed are they that mourn. The ability to mourn is a mark of character. Remember Peter after he denied Jesus (Mt. 26:75); Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35); Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37, 38); Isaiah and Jeremiah at the sins of Israel (Isa. 22:4; Jer. 9:1; Lamentations) and countless others. Men mourn because they have loved deeply and lost. Woe to him whose heart is so selfish that it is incapable of feeling grief! The tearless eye and the thoughtless heart are themselves causes for deep mourning. This explains Jesus' gladness to see a man weep. (Study Ezek. 9:3-6; Amos 6:6)

Within what frame of reference does Jesus pronounce this blessing? The whole impact of the Sermon commands the merely interested to become Jesus' disciples, if they would enjoy the true righteousness and the happiness He offers. Therefore, the two keys which open this blessing to our understanding are the recognition of the true origin of sorrow and the recognition of the true source of the blessing. Sin causes all grief, by one means or another, among both disciples and non-disciples alike. That is, mourning might be animated by the recognition of sin in one's self or by the shock of what it does to God and one's fellows. It could be the heartbreak, the shattered dreams that come from the sins of others. But hopeless, unrelieved grief will never find comfort, only death. (Cf. II Cor. 7:10b; I Th. 4:13) Further, the grief or mourning that is meant must be understood in a sense consistent with Jesus' ethic. It cannot be the frustrated distress of the man too old or sick to continue his revelry,

nor the anguish of the robber who learns that he overlooked more than he stole, nor the shabby penitence of the man who got caught in the act of some sin but cares little about the moral consequences of his deed.

Jesus offers Himself and His message (cf. Mt. 11:28, 29) as the only true source of hope and blessing to those who grieve. It may well be that they have yet no adequate concept of the true cause of their grief nor of a remedy for its comfort. But before Jesus will relieve them, He incites in their soul the consciousness of sin and the deep need to repent. Out of their encounter with Jesus will come such earnestness, such eagerness to clear oneself, such indignation and alarm, such zeal and correction of sin that the sorrowing will put themselves in a correct position to be comforted by Jesus. Those who fail to regard sin rightly will also have little regard for Jesus' method of dealing with the sorrow.

Another paraphrase of this word of Jesus might be: "Blessed are those who are ripped and torn by their struggles with human sorrow, for they are in a position to be encouraged. It is not the man who lives in a state of constant joy or receives all of this world's comforts that can know what true strengthening is."

They shall be comforted! This was Jesus' business (Isa. 61:1, 2), for He came to "comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." (Cf. Jas. 4:9) Not all the comfort is realized in the next world (Rev. 7:17; 21:3, 4), but is intended to empower us to face this one. **Comforted** (*paraklēthesontai*) does not mean that the sorrowing shall be anesthetized to the point that they will not feel their suffering or pain. Rather, it means that they will be strengthened, braced up, encouraged or cheered up to face the situation worthily as a disciple of the Lord.

"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep!" (Lk. 6:25b) This is the other side of the coin. There were undoubtedly clever ones who sought their amusement in ridicule of Jesus and His followers. There were others who would not take Jesus seriously, but they would not get the last laugh! (Note Psa. 2, esp. v. 4; 37:12, 13) Then there are those who are so shallow of character as to have no conscience. They cannot feel it in them to mourn about anything. To them, life is one grand comedy of laughs. Nothing is to be taken too seriously. The tragedy is that these clowns will mistake the one serious issue of all of life: what to do with Jesus.

5:5 **Blessed are the meek.** Other translations for "meek" (*praus*) are "gentle, humble, considerate, unassuming, courteous." It indicates that forbearance and consideration for others that is willing to waive its rights if by so doing the good of others can be advanced. Obviously, it is the opposite quality to arrogance and violence which seek to dominate others because of an insatiable drive for power that is willing to crush any and all opponents in the drive to realize that goal. Men are haughty and proud because of what they think themselves to be, or because of what they think that they by rights must possess. Thus, they think it one of the necessary sacrifices of the struggle to trample upon the heads of others in their race for control. But men who are truly meek already know that they are poor spiritually and have little reason thus to presume. This beatitude, a paradoxical shocker, carries this message: not the violently self-assertive but the considerate and unassuming will finally have possession of the earth! To the humble man who is wise enough to see it, Jesus is pronouncing the end of the competition in that futile social climbing where the selfish elbow their way to gain "their rightful place in the sun."

But the meek are not weak by any means! To hold one's emotions in check while the rest of one's society battles its way to the top in that heady contest, is not child's play. Often more strength is required to stay out of these rivalries than to join.

This word of Jesus does everything but cheer the hopes of those fierce nationalists who were itching for Roman blood in the realization of their dreams of a messianic kingdom that would proudly dominate the entire non-Jewish world. But even the cooler heads could not envision any other interpretation of the old prophets than this: "Blessed is my people Israel: for they shall dominate the earth by right of inheritance. The Gentiles were created merely to serve Israel."

O the wisdom of Jesus' words! Has it not ever been true that the most enduring power over men's hearts has been gained by serving them in that selfless help that frees the oppressed and raises the fallen? What masterful sway Jesus holds over men today just because He chose not to rule the world by cold steel and an iron fist! He chose rather the path of gentle courtesy and unselfish giving and how many would not joyfully accept the plundering of their property or public abuse and affliction for His sake? Jesus was meek (Mt. 11:29), and the earth became His to rule. (Phil. 2:5-11; Eph. 1:19-22)

But meekness does not always require the surrender of one's rights. Jesus and Paul both asserted their rights, without trampling upon those of others. (Cf. Jn. 18:19-23; Ac. 16:37; 22:25ff) Other examples are Paul's not demanding a salary (I Cor. 9:1-18; II Cor. 11:7-10); Peter before the Sanhedrin (Ac. 4); Stephen before that council (Ac. 7); and, Moses as he stood before Pharaoh and before Israel (Ex. 4 to the end of Moses' life; Num. 12:3).

Those who fall heir to the earth are and always have been those that God could teach. Without real humility a man cannot learn, since the prerequisite of learning is the admission of one's own ignorance. For other study of meekness compare: Ro. 12:3, 10, 12, 16-21; II Co. 10:1; Gal. 5:22, 23; 6:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; II Tim. 2:24-26; Tit. 3:2; Jas. 1:21; 3:13; I Pet. 3:4, 15, 16; 5:6.

For they shall inherit the earth. If "earth" (*gên*) be translated "land," the beatitude better adapts itself to the Jewish association of ideas. A study of Psa. 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34 will demonstrate that this phrase is almost a proverbial expression for "the highest of blessings," although, literally, any Jew would quite readily and rightly have understood it to mean the promised possession which was the land of Palestine. (Cf. Gen. 15:7, 8; 28:4; Ex. 32:13; Lev. 20:24; Dt. 16:20; Psa. 25:13; 69:36; Isa. 57:13; 60:21; 65:9; Ezek. 33:23-29) But only the blindest would fail to see that the whole tenor of such Psalms emphasized the truth that man's highest joys are realized only in God's presence. This means that man must be ready to move with God from His revelation of a "promised land," which might mean a small tract of land on the eastern Mediterranean coast, to His revelation of a "promised earth." (II Pet. 3:13) So, as Jesus makes this announcement of the true and appropriate disposition of the Father's goods, He holds out no hope for the crass, carnal dreams of the majority of His people. Yet He justified to the letter the keen spiritual insight of the true Israel.

How do *the meek inherit the earth?*

1. They enjoy it more fully in this life. Why?
 - a. Because, more than any others, they enjoy *whatever* God sends. The wicked, in their rush to possess, usually miss or overlook the best of this world, or else, having seen it, they refuse to pay the price to gain it, or having gained it, they are miserable.

- b. Because their character guarantees to them a greater measure of peace and stability. Their calmness allows time for better judgment, their contentment assures their safety under law, and their sense of justice builds confidence.
 - c. Because they are stable of character, they can become the wise advisors to rulers who listen. (Cf. Daniel and his three friends, Dan. 1-3; 6:1)
2. They will inherit the new earth. (II Pet. 3:13) This promise means the end of the present competition with the greedy, the cruel, the proud and the selfish, for all that they sought to amass for themselves for eternity will finally be the true possession of the humble.

The irony is complete: they who struggle most feverishly, in the end lose it all, while they who cheerfully, generously and humbly seek the good of others inherit it all!

5:6 Blessed are they who are hungry and thirsting after righteousness. Observe the present participles (*peinóntes*, *dipsóntes*), for they probably express a continuing, constantly-felt longing. Jesus challenges our real desire for goodness: "Are you so intensely and sharply pained by your need of true righteousness that you would die unless you get it? Just how badly do you want to be righteous?" (See 13:44-46) Such questions criticize our satisfaction with partial goodness, half-way accomplishment and partly-kept promises to be good. Jesus cannot leave men in peace if He is to convert them. The self-sufficient, the smugly self-complacent and the self-righteous are the only people on earth beyond the help of God. Jesus bestows the favor of God upon those who are bitterly dissatisfied with themselves, discontent and broken by their sense of need for righteousness. A full man feels no need to eat or drink (Lk. 6:25). This is why Jesus expressed His horror of that self-contentment that inevitably deals a death blow to any possibility of development or improvement. A man's moral health and personal righteousness really depend upon whether he thinks himself to have arrived at a satisfactory perfection: if he has "arrived," he has not! A classic example to study: Lk. 18:9-14.

They shall be filled. Here is a hint at the most basic doctrine of Christ's religion: justification by faith. If righteousness be so desired as hunger and thirst seek their respective satisfactions,

then the seeker's imperfections and need for righteousness are confessed. Such a tormenting hunger for a right character or right standing before God must, by its nature, admit the faulty character and dangerous position of those thus tortured. This beatitude also hints that the blessing of filling comes from without and is unconnected with the relative merits of the recipient. How can that man who is already righteous in his own eyes, already filled and perfected by his own strength, find joy in Jesus' promise? God is glad to impute righteousness to the man who comes to Him for filling (Ro. 4:23-25; 5:1-11), but he who thus comes will be one humbled by his continuing and increasing sense of need.

Paradoxically, this beatitude promises satisfaction in a matter in which satisfaction seems impossible: can we ever get to be righteous enough? But Jesus promises satisfaction, not satiation which destroys interest or desire. Since, elsewhere in the Sermon, Jesus defines and illustrates the true righteousness of God, that may reflect back on this beatitude, suggesting that Jesus means here: "Those who seek my kind of righteousness will actually find it. He who trusts himself to my leadership will arrive at his destination, which, if he follows the best of modern scholarly opinion on the subject, he will never see!" Jesus Himself is God's answer to our deepest need for righteousness. We must come to Him as empty pitchers to a full fountain to be filled. God's ability to supply always exceeds our demand, but He supplies in proportion to our demand. Thus, God judges us by the dreams that drive us, quite as much as by our few accomplishments. If we keep our zest for godly living, our enthusiasm for being His and doing His will, He will see to it that we have the strength and opportunity to be truly righteous, and best of all, His forgiveness when we fail. Thus, His filling is in a large measure based upon our putting ourselves in a position to be filled.

There is a sense in which it might be said that the entire world is hungering and thirsting for righteousness because of its obvious need. But the world is not blessed until it comes to Jesus (Jn. 4:13, 14; 6:27ff; 7:37-39; Ro. 10:1-4) who is all the righteousness that is needed (I Cor. 1:30).

5:7 Blessed are the merciful. What a contradiction of the dreams of the Jewish freedom fighters whose aspirations offered little mercy to the enemy! How this dashed the plans of the self-aggrandizing who sought prestige, wealth and power at the expense of others! How this unmasked the hypocrisy of those who show mercy only to friends

or family but are basically unsympathetic to human needs beyond the limited circle of those who can easily reciprocate this mercy! (Lk. 10:25-37)

Again, this beatitude tends to shake the self-confidence by delivering God's sentence against every concept of heartless legalism. The man who regards his relationship to God as a matter of piling up merit by doing a certain number of religious acts with a view to his purchase of heaven, may well be treating his fellow man with that same, exacting, "pound-for-pound" justice. Is it not a structural weakness of the extremely pious also to be utterly pitiless in their dealings with others? At least the self-righteous tend to show this fatal defect of being exceedingly critical of others who have not arrived at their superior standard, so critical to the point of considering it as rendering service to God to show no mercy to them! (Cf. Mt. 18:21-35; Jn. 16:2; Jas. 4:11, 12; also Mt. 9:13 and 12:7).

But God condemned all unmercifulness, because it assumes a position of absolute righteousness and perfect justice, a position which a sinner does not occupy. An unmerciful sinner is just a hypocrite. Unmercifulness shows itself in partiality (Lk. 6:32-37; Jas. 2:1-13), selfish orthodoxy (Jas. 2:14-17; I Jn. 3:16-18) and harsh judgment (Mt. 7:2).

Service most pleasing to God is not merely outward ritual, in which the unmerciful legalist may pride himself, but godlike dealing with our weak, sinful fellow humans. God commanded certain rituals to enable sinners to partake of His merciful forgiveness. But by these rituals God has always intended that man should learn to BE merciful. Any religionist, who can be unmerciful with those who have not his same apprehension of the rituals or his understanding of the doctrines or his own religious stature, possesses a FALSE religion, according to Jesus. (Mt. 9:9-13; 12:1-14) It should be no wonder that Jesus views deeds of true mercy to others as done (or not done) to Himself (Mt. 25:34-46; cf. Prov. 19:17).

How does mercy show itself?

1. By gentleness with sinners (Heb. 4:14—5:3; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:32), or with those who Christian convictions are different (Ro. 14:1—15:7; I Cor. 8:1-13; 10:23—11:1), or with those whose religious tenets are wrong (II Tim. 2:24-26), or with those whose religious connections are merely different (Mk. 9:38-41; Ac. 11:19-24; 9:26-28)

2. By helpfulness to those who need help (Psa. 41:1-3; 37:21, 25, 26; Lk. 6:34-36, 38; 10:37; 14:12-14; Ac. 11:27-30)
3. By forgiveness (Prov. 19:11; Gen. 50:17-21; Num. 12:1-13; Mt. 18:15-35; Lk. 17:3, 4; Ac. 7:60)

Can you think of other ways in which we can be merciful?

But beware of substitutes for Christian mercy! Godly mercy cannot mean connivance with sin. Mercy becomes only sentimental softness or careless indulgence when it ignores justice. Justice and mercy are not mutually exclusive. (Cf. Mt. 23:23; Ro. 3:23-26) Christian mercy must justly condemn sin in order to save the sinner. The most merciful act one can do for a sinner is to cause him to acknowledge his sin, break his heart and lead to repent. Analyze Nathan's strategy when he compassionately applied the divine scalpel to David's heinous sin. (II Sam. 12:1-15) Mercy that slurs over the cruelty and the wrong which men afflict on others, as things merely to be forgiven and forgotten, is a grotesque, immoral caricature of the genuine thing. Christian mercy involves compassion for the sinner, but severity to the sin.

Another substitute for Christian mercy is mere pity, that natural tenderness of heart which may be but an unreasoning impulse. Christian clemency is actuated by principle, not merely emotion, and must be just. Because mercy is the right hand of love, it always seeks intelligently to do what is in the other person's best interest, fully knowing that they may be ungrateful and selfish, unjust and evil (Mt. 5:45; Lk. 6:35).

For they shall obtain mercy from God and their fellows. Showing mercy to others tends to awaken the same spirit in them, stimulating them to be lenient. "The merciful man does good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubles his own flesh." (Prov. 11:17) "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard." (Prov. 21:13) The unmerciful cannot expect but the same treatment in return. (Lk. 6:32-38)

The stunning truth of Christianity which makes it a unique religion is that, according to Jesus, God lets man determine the rigor with which the standard is to be applied! God will deal with us just as we would treat others. (Mt. 7:2; 6:12, 14; 10:40-42; 18:35; 25:31-46; cf. II Tim. 1:16-18; II Sam. 22:26; Psa. 112:4-6, 9) There is absolutely no way for man to be merciful to God. Man must show

himself compassionate, lenient, generous and forgiving to his peers. God will mitigate or intensify the demands of absolute justice with the individual on the basis of his conduct in this very matter with his fellows. What a terrible prospect of merciless judgment faces him who has shown no mercy! But to him who has been merciful, even the unchanging demands of perfect justice bow to the mercy of God. (Jas. 2:13) For the delight of your spiritual life and a model of devotional excellence, ponder that great hymn to the mercy of God, Psalm 103.

This beatitude is another hint at the grace of God. Jesus speaks as though men are going to NEED mercy, suggesting that none will really be able to earn their right to God's kingdom. "Happy is that man who admits to himself that he is a sinner and never arrogates to himself the position of unrelenting Judge, but is continually liberal with his compassion, intelligent with his leniency, ready to forgive, for God enjoys forgiving that kind of man."

5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart. Whether the Jews caught the point of the beatitude may be questioned, but a moment's reflection reveals that Jesus is attacking all purely external religion. He is combatting the most cherished ideas of the Pharisees and cannot help but arouse their antagonism by such speech. These are "fighting words" which will be repeated with increasing intensity and frequency. (Cf. 5:20; 6:1-18; 7:15-23; 12:33-37; 15:1-20; 23:1-36) Ceremonial purity, secured by numerous washings, by avoiding contact with certain contaminating objects such as corpses and non-Jews, by abstinence from certain foods, does not qualify for fellowship with God anyone whose HEART is contaminated! (Prov. 15:8; 21:3; 27; I Sam. 15:22; Psa. 51:16, 17; Isa. 1:11-20; Mic. 6:7, 8) Those who shall be permitted a ready audience of the King Himself, are not those who punctiliously perform but those who are personally pure. (Psa. 15:1-15; 24:3-6; Prov. 22:11) Jesus' challenged to His and any age is simply: "How very badly do you want to see God? Are you willing, then, to open up your inmost thoughts, your best-hidden desires, your secret designs for the inspection of God? How happy is that man who so lives that at any moment he could bare his heart to the eye of God without shame. Who is willing to pay this price to enter the kingdom?" Jesus is keenly interested in the quality of a man's inmost being. (Cf. Mt. 5:28; 6:21; 13:1-9, 18-23; 15:8, 18, 19; Mk. 3:5; 11:23; Lk. 16:15; 21:34)

But the corruption and filth of the human heart does not permit such an exposure to those who are honest with themselves. We often have two motives behind each of our "good deeds": the one we want others to know and the real one by which we profit from the deed. And, try as we might, we cannot quite succeed in living on that level where all our actions exactly represent our true desires. But Jesus did not leave man to grovel in his impurity, for He provided the means by which man can be reborn (Jn. 3:3-5; Tit. 2:14; 3:5) and become a completely new creature (II Cor. 5:17-21). By cleansing the heart by faith, Jesus arrives at a moral condition that no legal system, governing merely external conduct, could produce. (Cf. Ac. 15:9; I Pet. 1:22). Jesus aims His teaching at the selfish sentiments, the distorted conscience and the obstinate will, for everything else emanates from these sources. (Prov. 4:23; Mt. 12:34-37; 15:8, 18, 19) "Happy is the man whose heart has been cleansed!" (Cf. Ps. 51; Jn. 15:3; I Tim. 1:5; 3:9; II Tim. 1:3; 2:22; Tit. 1:15; Jas. 1:27; Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16; 9:14)

How does *purity of heart* manifest itself?

1. Chastity of a mind so clean that lust cannot live (Mt. 5:28)
2. Basic honesty so well-known that oaths are unnecessary (5:33-37) and worship and service becomes real (6:1-18)
3. Intelligent love so perfect that hate, anger, contempt (5:22ff), personal retaliation (5:39-42) and partiality (5:44-48) have no place in the pure heart.
4. Singleness of mind so completely confident of God's provision that worry and materialism are impossible (Jas. 4:8; see notes on Mt. 6:19-24)
5. It is that singleness of mind and purpose that owns only one Master (6:22-24)

In short, it is that freedom from all thoughts, motives and intentions behind conduct that defile man and cut him off from God's fellowship.

For they shall see God. (Cf. Heb. 12:14; I Jn. 3:2, 3; Rev. 22:4; Psa. 51:7-11) Faith and a regenerated heart help man to see God (Eph. 1:17ff; Rom. 5:1ff; II Cor. 3:12—4:6). We see only what we are able to see. By keeping our heart pure, we are now training ourselves to see God, or else if we refuse to submit to this discipline, we shall never be able fully to see Him.

This proposition is historically true: only those, whose hearts were bent upon doing God's will, saw God in Jesus. The rest did not. Yet, any who saw Jesus should have seen God. (Jn. 10:30; 14:9) Why did the rest fail to see Him? Because they already had their minds made up about what God had to be, say and do. So when God came walking among them in the person of Jesus, they frankly did not recognize Him. They had been unwilling to submit to God's will, for they really served sin (Jn. 8:31-47). Thus, they heard no echoes of the Father's voice in the tones of Jesus, because they did not really know the Father. (Jn. 5:38-47; 7:17)

What Jesus declares rings true psychologically: those who have not spent the whole of their life energies seeking God's approval, would not be happy to see Him anyhow. Even admission into the presence of our glorious and holy God would be hellish torment to those whose hearts are contaminated. Therefore, God, in banishing the wicked from His presence forever, is but mercifully conceding them their last wish! "The impure in heart shall not see God."

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers. To those arrogant Jews who expected God's Messiah to wage war, leaving all Gentile nations grovelling subjects of Israel, this beatitude must have come as a shock. Those who secretly nourished the hope that Jesus would help them realize all their fiercely nationalistic ambitions against the world must have felt keenly disappointed. (Note Jn. 6:14, 15) Jesus clearly announces a spiritual kinship to God which is not a question of nationality, social standards, economic position or bloodline descent. It is a matter of spiritual likeness to God. (Ro. 8:14; 15:33; Mt. 5:44, 45) God's sons are not the warlike, yearning to assert their political supremacy over the rest of the world, but those who labor to create peace. Observe that Jesus said "peacemakers," not "peace lovers." He wants His disciples to be active promoters of peace, not merely peaceable men. The peacemaker does not fold his hands, but he rolls up his sleeves. (Heb. 12:14)

This beatitude is a trumpet-call to war, however to battle on quite another front than the usual one. Jesus is challenging the deepest commitment and the basic sincerity of each disciple: "Are you willing to stick your neck out, to get involved in the troubles of others, to risk the loss of your personal tranquillity? Are you so convinced of the value of human brotherhood that no cost is too high to bring about justice and peace in any situation where men strive with their

fellows?" The Lord is appealing to man's fighting heart, that hero in the soul of each of us, to get involved in this warfare for peace.

But Jesus' peace corps volunteers are those who share His world-view and seek the peace on His terms. This means fighting with spiritual weapons against SIN (Jas. 4:1-5), the real cause of strife, bitterness, hate and war. (Eph. 6:10-18; II Cor. 10:2-5) It means waging war not upon mere ignorance but rather ignorance of God (Hos. 4:1, 2, 6), not upon mere poverty of purse but poverty of soul. It means not merely to seek to bring about an absence of hostilities, but to teach men to love one another. It cannot mean anesthetizing men into tranquil self-satisfaction in sin; it must mean bringing rebels to their knees before God, seeking to be reconciled to Him on His terms. In His peacemaking mission, Jesus lost His life (Eph. 2:14-17) and, in the strife against sin, His disciple may not expect to fare any better (Heb. 12:2-4; Mt. 10:34ff). Obviously, the Christian cannot make his peace with the world without risking his peace with God (Jas. 4:4), so he must not seek a peace at any price. Rather, he must sow for a harvest of righteousness. (Jas. 3:18)

Jesus does not hereby justify mere pacificism, for this usually means opposition to war or to the use of military force for any purpose, or that attitude of mind which opposes all war and advocates settlement of every international dispute entirely by arbitration. He is, first of all, discussing His ideal disciple, not establishing rules for international control of nations or power-groups who do not acknowledge His authority. For Jesus' disciple to refuse to take part in an *aggressive* war is in perfect accord with Jesus spirit here expressed. But Satan still commands enough powerful forces in the world to threaten world domination at the expense of the rest of humanity. For the Christian to adopt a policy of opposition to war with those tyrants who would suppress all opinions but their own, is to betray the rest of humanity into their hands. Paul, on the other hand, defends the right of governments to use force to maintain a just order; this he does on the basis of the declaration that God Himself has given that right (Ro. 13:1-7). Not one centurion was instructed to forsake the army to demonstrate the reality of his faith in Jesus or the genuineness of his repentance (Mt. 8:5-13; Ac. 10, 11); likewise for the common soldiers (Lk. 3:14). Even the attempt to arbitrate every international dispute by use of the conference table often fails, because of the unchangeable desire of one power to rule the world. The difficulty with idealistic pacificism is that it naively

assumes that all men are inspired by the same high ideals. Is it loving one's neighbor to stand idly by doing nothing while another hacks him to pieces? (See notes on 5:38-48) Peacemaking, considered on the state or international level, is basically beyond the scope of this beatitude for two reasons: first, true peace on earth is impossible where sin reigns; second, the only effective means of removing sin is by conversion through the gospel of Jesus, and this can be applied only at the level of the individual. If the morality of Jesus, which He aimed at the individual, be applied on the level of unconverted society, the result will be disastrous: the structure of society will be destroyed by the unconverted who take advantage of the non-resistance offered by the rest of society, and the ethic of Jesus (thus wrongly understood and applied) will be either reduced to an ineffective whisper, or else laughed off the human stage as completely unworthy of further consideration.

How does one go about making peace?

1. He must first be a man in whom bitterness and strife cannot dwell and, in consequence of his character, a man whom men can trust to be fair. (Lk. 6:35; II Tim. 2:24-26; Jas. 3:13-17)
2. Then he can bridge the distance between the antagonists. (Mt. 18:15-35; Phil. 4:2, 3; Philemon; Eph. 2:11-18)
3. He can heal the break by rebuilding the human concern for one another. (Cf. Ac. 7:26; Ro. 15:25-31; II Cor. 9:12-14)
4. He must be thoroughly impartial: perfectly just in seeking and removing the cause of estrangement but thoroughly merciful with the persons involved. (Gal. 2:11f; II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:1-10)

For they shall be called sons of God. Just as God got involved in the sin, pain, misery and strife of this wicked race, even so those who lay down their lives to make peace wherever their influence extends, will be recognized by the "very spirit and image of their Father" which they bear. So regardless of all their pretenses to orthodoxy, warring factionists, by the very nature of the case, disprove their claim to be "sons of God." If Jesus means the phrase "sons of God" according to the Hebrew idiom which means "like God," then actual sonship, that relationship to God brought about by faith in Jesus (Jn. 1:12, 13), is not necessarily and immediately broken by such hatefulness. However, continued bitterness, unforgiven grudges

and factional infighting do actually destroy that former connection with the Father. For the present, Jesus is saying, he who claims to be a son of God must act like God. (Mt. 5:45; Lk. 6:35)

On the other hand, if Jesus meant "sons of God" in the sense that is developed in the New Testament, He is describing one of the essential characteristics of such a "son," without which none can claim to be one of God's children. (Other passages illustrating this concept: Ro. 8:14-21; II Cor. 6:18; Gal. 3:26; 4:5-7; Eph. 1:5; 5:1, 8; Heb. 2:10; 12:5-8; I Jn. 3:10; 5:1, 2).

5:10-12. Because these three verses present basically the same beatitude, the various parts will be considered together with their parallels. This beatitude reinforces or puts character into those that precede it, by warning that our humility must not degenerate into a cringing, submissive slavery, or our peacemaking abased to compromise of our convictions, nor our meekness lowered to sinful compliance. By these surprising paradoxes, Jesus is daring one to be His disciple whatever the cost.

Moral, if not physical, suffering is to be expected by the genuinely good man. Jesus pronounces as the truly happy those who are so anchored to their character or convictions that they cannot be bribed, cajoled or threatened into surrender of principle. To accept persecution, as a necessary sacrifice involved in standing for what one deems right, means that he has a conscience that is unyielding and exacting. Jesus has no use for the spineless, careless man without a conscience, for nobody can count upon him! The religion of Jesus is for the poor in spirit, the sorrowing, the meek and merciful, yes, but these must be stout-hearted men who have the moral stamina to stand for the cause of Jesus.

The Jews expected the Messiah to bring total victory in the wars preceding the establishment of the universal reign of David over the world. They expected that even the lowliest Jewish citizen should rule many Gentiles. Those who were pinning their nationalistic hopes to Jesus' campaigns must have received this last beatitude with hurt surprise and chagrin. Here are the first major indications of Jesus' royal road to glory: His servants will suffer. What a warning lies just below the surface: "Count the cost! How badly do you wish to be mine? I will be asking you, my friend, to be the conscience of the world, to praise where there is good and to condemn its wickedness. The world cannot agree with my judgment as to the nature of true righteousness, and you, my dear follower, as you represent this standard,

will be caught in the cross-fire of these two standards." Jesus challenges the heroic in men, but He would have them be realistic. (Cf. Mt. 10:16-39; 16:24-27; Mk. 10:28-30).

But what sort of suffering does Jesus mean? Persecution begins as a talking war of reproach (v. 11), or insults heaped upon the disciple of Jesus, with a view to curbing him socially, trying to intimidate him into abandoning his position. Another line of attack will be slander: **all manner of evil said against you falsely.** Luke (6:22, 26) uses these terms: "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revil you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! . . . Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." The Christian must remember that praise is another form of social control and must be evaluated. The praise of the unqualified judge is no guarantee of true worth; rather, it merely indicates that he who has won it has not risen above the standard of him who gives it. Jesus' servant must keep his head clear to be able to discern the true source of the praise he seeks or of the criticism he fears. (Mt. 10:26-33; Lk. 12:4,5)

Where could persecution strike? Sometimes this oppression is religious, while at other times it attacks the social life of the disciple. Almost always it cuts into the family and home life, severing the nearest and dearest connections the disciple knows. (Cf. Jn. 16:2; II Tim. 3:12; Heb. 10:32-39; 12:4; 13:3, 13; I Pet. 1:6-9; 2:12, 19-21; 3:14-18a; 4:12-19; 5:9, 10) The apostles got a taste of this during Jesus' ministry, but they felt its full force after He had gone. (Ac. 4; 5:17-42; 7; 9; 12 etc. II Cor. 4:7-12; 6:8-10; 11:23-33; Jn. 15:18—16:4)

What is the cause for which Jesus' servants must face suffering?

1. **For righteousness' sake.** The term *righteousness* must be interpreted in this context and in the larger framework of the New Testament, not forced to cover every civil rights cause that the unconverted, moved by humanitarian principles, might suggest, however just might be their particular plea. While those causes often seek proper ends in justice for minority or underprivileged groups, yet the righteousness Jesus is talking about involves faith and obedience to Him! (Jn. 5:22, 23; 6:28, 29; 8:24, 31, 32; 3:35, 36) *Righteousness*, as Jesus intends it, is the very character of God required as the standard of judgment of the world and bestowed upon believers. In its practical manifestation, for which the follower

of Jesus must be ready to suffer, it becomes equivalent to Christianity. (Note I Pet. 3:14-18; 4:12-19) But why would the world persecute men for "doing right"? Because the world hates the conscience-like effect of the Christian life and testimony, for they must condemn the world's sins. (Cf. Jn. 3:20; 7:7; 15:18-21)

2. **For my sake.** What sublime originality! Jesus calls men not simply to suffer for conscience' sake or only for sake of convictions or because of life's ordinary trials, but "for my sake." There is a wide psychological difference between devotion to abstract principles or an impersonal cause, devotion to a Person. (Cf. Phil. 3:4-10; I Pet. 4:13) Jesus does not say to "rejoice when men separate you from their company because of your own folly or your own personal notions," but when they do it "because you are MY disciple!" No man can stand this loneliness and reviling for a creed, cause or conviction, but he can for *Jesus!* A man must be prepared to be lonely when he decides for His discipleship and chooses to know Jesus' love alone.

For my sake puts the right emphasis on one's suffering. For denouncing oneself to the Roman magistrates who were enforcing the persecutions, merely to seek martyrdom, is a selfish act. That is suffering for the unwholesome desire for suffering and death, or perhaps it is an escape mechanism to terminate the uncertainties of this life, a *coup de grace* to put an end to further Christian testimony that could be given! Again, those who receive persecution, because they cram their religious convictions down the throats of their neighbors, do not glorify Jesus, since their manners essentially differed from those of the Master.

Further, Jesus multiplies the sources of encouragement needed for the hours of persecution ahead: "Remember God's servants the prophets! **For so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.**" The world has always persecuted those who spoke to it in the name of the Lord. It seems that every age kills its own prophets, while building memorials to the prophets of former generations. (Note Mt. 23:29-36; Ac. 7:51-53; II Chron. 36:12, 15, 16; Jas. 5:10; I Th. 2:15; Heb. 11:32-38) Two striking lessons stand out:

1. The Christians are to bolster their courage in the knowledge that they will be treading the steps of God's mightiest, most fearless spokesmen of the past, and thus, they will be participating in God's crucial testimony to a degenerate age as they add their voices to the announcement of God's judgment. But the underlying implication is clear that Jesus, in placing His people on a par with those Old Testament worthies, is identifying service to Him with service to God. Their service to God not only resembled the suffering of the prophets (5:12), but also was to involve powerful preaching (5:14-16; 10:26-28) and a salutary influence upon their society (5:13).
2. The Christians would be facing the same prejudices, the same perversity, impenitence, pride and the same deeply-intrenched and corrupt religious and political leaders. They would face the same heartless, brutal force which stops at nothing to withstand the truth. Christians, like the prophets, would be unarmed, not using the ordinary weapons employed to force one's will, being able only to promote the truth by the demonstration of the Spirit and God's power. (I Cor. 2:1-5; II Cor. 10:3-6) But one can take a lot more punishment if he is sure he is part of a movement greater than himself. To see, with the eyes of faith, the unflinching prophets standing beside one as he faces his persecutors, is to draw upon sources of courage deeper than oneself. Jesus is saying, "When you suffer for me, you never stand alone as you give your testimony: the prophets have stood right where you stand."

The only way of enjoying the smiles of one's age seems to lie in playing false to one's God. (Lk. 6:26)

Perhaps the only reason Jesus does not offer His own example at this time ("for thus they will do to the Son of man"), is that the resurrection had not yet occurred, giving power to His comforting words. Besides, His audience at this stage of their spiritual development might have been too scandalized. After the empty tomb, the apostles could shout to Christians, surrounded by fearful, relentless persecution, "Remember Jesus!" (II Tim. 2:8; Heb. 12:2, 3)

The almost unbelievable part of this beatitude is the nature of its exceeding great reward. Jesus said, "Blessed are ye! Rejoice

in that day and be exceeding glad: leap for joy!" (Lk. 6:23) The blessing goes two ways:

1. Uninhibited joy in **the kingdom of heaven** now. This is not a morbid longing for or seeking persecution which makes pain and suffering ends in themselves to be sought at the expense of the cause of righteousness. In fact, happiness is very elusive in that it cannot be sought without being lost in the search. According to Jesus, true joy exists only when we seek God's purposes. After all, is this not the essence of God's kingdom on earth? (Cf. Jn. 5:11; 16:22, 24; 17:13; Ac. 5:40-42; Phil. 4:4; cf. 1:12-14; Ro. 5:1-11) The devil has no happy old men, because all their lives they have sought happiness by evading the very service that brings the only real joy.
2. The **great reward in heaven** for eternity. See article: "The Reasonableness of the Redeemer's Rewarding of Righteousness." (Cf. II Jn. 8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12)

What is the lesson here? Jesus' words make us reflect: how long has it been since we felt the sting of hate-filled words aimed at us because we are Christian. Why is there little persecution experienced by the Church today? Could it be partly that the principles of Jesus have received such universal acknowledgement as being the right principles, even if so rarely practiced, that the world has been rendered more favorable or more tolerant toward Christians and Christianity? If so, this might hold the forces of evil at bay for a time. Or could the relative absence of persecution be due to the Church's growing lukewarm to its own message? I, as a Christian, could enjoy more comfort if I were more indifferent. But Jesus says, "Happy are the persecuted for my sake!" If this language strikes the modern reader as extravagant, it is because of the great difference between the twentieth century philosophy and God's will, and between the few glowing embers of modern Christianity contrasted to the roaring forest fire that was first century discipleship. How must this difference be accounted for? Most tend to measure the amount of happiness in their lives by the extent to which they escape trouble and suffering. But the only salvation from such a delusion is the realization that true happiness means "being conformed to the image of God's Son" who met His death on a cross! (Study I Th. 3:3, 4; Col. 1:24; Ro. 8:29; Phil. 1:27-30)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who are the spiritually poor? the spiritually rich?
2. How can mourning bring comfort?
3. What is the true cause of all sorrow? the true source of its comfort?
4. What kind of character is meek? Tell several ways in which the meek man is shown to be such.
5. What is the kingdom of heaven? How is this a particularly rich blessing to the "poor in spirit"?
6. What kind of comfort does Jesus promise to those who mourn? What does the word "comfort" mean, as Jesus used it here?
7. In what ways will the meek "inherit the earth"? What earth?
8. What makes a man "hunger and thirst after righteousness"? Explain this figure of speech and its implications.
9. What is implied in the phrase "they shall be filled," with reference to "righteousness"? How will they be "filled"? What has this to do with the great doctrine of God's grace?
10. Who are the "merciful"? Name some of the ways in which Christian mercy shows itself.
11. From whom do the merciful obtain mercy?
12. Show how mercifulness contrasts the legalistic spirit.
13. Name two attitudes often mistaken for Christian mercy.
14. Who are the "pure in heart"?
15. How does heart purity contrast with merely external religion? with good works done for public notice?
16. What is the difference between "peaceful men" and "peacemakers"?
17. What kind of man must the peacemaker be?
18. How does one go about "making peace"?
19. Does Jesus justify pacificism movements that do not share His views?
20. Why should the peacemakers that Jesus was talking about be called "sons of God"? What does it mean to be called a "son of God"?
21. Jesus pronounces happy those who are persecuted for what two specifically named causes? (vv. 10, 11)
22. Why does Jesus bring up "the prophets who were before you"?
23. Name the two precious rewards that Jesus holds out for those suffering for His sake.

24. Justify Jesus' offering rewards to encourage people to seek God's kingdom and righteousness and suffer for Jesus' sake.
25. Name each of the eight beatitudes, showing how each contradicts the popular views of Jesus' day. How do they likewise refute those of our day?
26. Name the eight great rewards that indicate the true happiness of those bearing the named characteristics.

B. THE MISSION OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN

TEXT: 5:13-16

13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.
14. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.
15. Neither do *men* light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.
16. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How is it possible for us to do our good works "before men, that they may see them," and, at the same time, do it in such a way as not to lose our reward from our Father? (See Mt. 6:1-18)
- b. What would be the condition of the world without the influence of Christians and the Church? One would not be committing the fallacy of formulating a hypothesis contrary to fact, if he: (1) examines those societies where Christ's will is unknown or ignored; (2) bases his answer upon the condition of the world before Jesus came; or, (3) upon God's infallible judgment which in itself is based upon perfect knowledge of man's actions and motives. (Ro. 1, 2; Eph. 2:1-3, 11, 12; 4:17-19; 5:3-12)
- c. What do you think would be the impact upon Jesus' Jewish audience made by the words "earth" and "world" in the phrases: "Ye are the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world"?
- d. Who really gets the credit for the things we do?

PARAPHRASE

"You are the world's salt; you stand in the same relation to the world as does salt to meat which is decomposing. But if salt becomes insipid or tasteless, how is its saltiness to be restored or the meat to be preserved? That is, if you lose your power to preserve from moral corruption, how could you restore that lost power? And how would the world, in that case, be preserved from corruption, decay and death? Just as insipid salt is thus useless and deserves to be thrown out on the streets to be trampled by men, likewise, you too would be morally good for nothing to God, and would deserve all the contempt that men could heap upon you.

"You are the world's light. It is impossible to hide a city built on a hilltop. When a lamp is lit, it is not put under a peck-measure, but on a lampstand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. And you, like the lamp, must shed light among your fellows in such a way that when they see the good you do, they may praise your heavenly Father."

NOTES

Jesus has indicated the character and blessings which fall to the wise and godly man in God's kingdom. He proposes to make of His disciples something as great as the prophets. (See v. 12) Now He describes another facet of their ideal character and something of their work as well as the influence they are to have upon the world.

5:13 **Ye are the salt of the earth.** Jesus maintains as undeniable fact that His disciples are this salt. Whether or not they will serve effectively in that capacity, as good salt preserves meat from spoiling, will depend upon the flavor of their discipleship; however, there is no escaping the fact that they, because of their relationship to Jesus, are already this salt. *Ye*: this is spoken to a group of peasants, unlettered fishermen, small town folk, without reputation or standing, members of a small, haughty, exclusive, hated race. For the moment, Jesus looks at His disciples not as they were then, but at what ideally they could become and do to their society. He was trying to get them to see in themselves the ability to transform the moral tone of their age! By calling them the "salt of the earth," He set before them the most positive, far-reaching program imaginable: preservation of the world from destruction! *Of*

the earth is another hint of the universality of Jesus' gospel, because it looks beyond the confines of one small people to all the nations under God's loving care.

Ye are the salt is an unexplained metaphor. It must be asked, therefore, what those points of nature or function might be which are common both to the disciple and to salt. We see that:

1. *Salt preserves from decay.* This is a tacit but implicit judgment regarding "*the earth*:" the actual condition of society is rottenness and corruption, a judgment verified elsewhere. (Ro. 1:18-21; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:17-19, 22) But salt does not preserve by acting upon itself: it preserves that which needs its influence by being brought into contact with every inch of that which will corrupt without it. Jesus' disciple is of little value to the community as long as his influence remains boxed up in a church building or monastery. The contact of the spiritual salt must be scattered so as to affect every part of the decomposing neighborhood. The monastic tendencies of those Christians, who have no Christ-like influence outside the four walls of the local meeting place of the Church, drastically fails Jesus at this point. (Note Jesus' example and reasoning: Mt. 9:10-13; Lk. 15; 19:1-10.)

2. *Salt produces its effect secretly but surely without furious fanfares and earth-shaking commotion.* Jesus wants a man whose personal purity **CONTROLS** the moral tone of any group in which he happens to be, or by whose presence in a given situation he defeats the corruption of the morals of others. This corruption shows itself in the lowering of the standards of honesty, diligence in work, conscientiousness just as much as in the corruption of the ethics of physical chastity. Every saint of God must be a walking conscience whose conduct, character and conversation bring God's law right into the evil society, whose seriousness of purpose points solemnly to the reality of the judgment. Basically, Jesus' people must be anchor-like conservatives who hold the line against the corrupting bacterias of every purportedly "new theology" and "new morality." Not only is Christians' gospel vigorously opposed to that which contradicts God's revealed theology and morality, but also their very presence in the world tends to make intellectual cowards of the innovators until these latter can gain the upper hand, since men have tended to acknowledge the Christian morality as right even if unwilling to live it. But Jesus has other plans for winning the battle through

energetic evangelism and conservation of the gains. (Mt. 28:18-20; Col. 1:27-29)

3. *Salt retains its value only if it maintains its distinctive character.* "If the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" This is an ominous warning of the doom of the degenerate disciple, for Jesus speaks of one who has truly possessed this inner reality of regenerate power but has lost it. A problem arises regarding the second part of Jesus' rhetorical question: wherewith shall **WHAT** be salted? the *earth*? or the *salt* itself?

- a. "If the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall *the earth* be salted?" God wishes to use you to save this world from its headlong plunge into moral rottenness and destruction, but if your moral stamina be exhausted, with what other means could He save it? (Cf. Eph. 3:9, 10) This interpretation suggests the impossibility for a corrupt Church to have any significant effect to stop the world's forward rush into final moral dissoluteness. No other gospel can substitute God's plan of redemption in Christ; likewise, no social uplift organization can fill the gap left by a degenerate Church.
- b. "If the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall *its saltiness* be restored?" Modern, purified salt does not lose its quality; hence, some would suggest that Jesus is saying that, just as it is absurd that salt should lose its flavor and therefore it would be impossible to restore its saltiness, so, you, my disciples, cannot lose your preserving power. But Jesus was describing salt that His hearers knew only too well. Who among them had not at one time or another bought some of that salt native to Palestine? It came chiefly from the crystals gathered from the residue of evaporated water taken from the Dead Sea. It is said that this salt changes its flavor because of the presence of salts other than sodium chloride, actually losing its saltiness and worth through exposure to the sun and rain. At that point it might look like salt, but it fails to do what good salt does. This fact suggests the not unlikely interpretation of Jesus' question: "Once lost, salt's distinctive character and usefulness cannot be restored." A degenerate disciple, or any group of them, is of no use to God and cannot be restored to their former character unless they repent and turn to Him who constituted them salt in

the first place. This exception is an important difference between the literal and spiritual salt, since the former cannot repent. Jesus is not teaching the impossibility of repentance *on their part*, but the impossibility of *another's* renewing them to their original state. (See Heb. 6:4-6 with which compare I Cor. 5:1-8; II Cor. 2:5-11)

As a practical result, this latter interpretation contains the former, since any disciple or congregation, having irremediably lost their power to save the world through faithlessness or refusal to repent, cannot be substituted with something which is not salt, and the world remains lost. The lesson is clear: God's plan to use good salt to preserve the earth in righteousness has been thwarted by every case of savorless salt. And what is it yet good for? **Nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men!** Here is the tragedy of uselessness: the catastrophe hides in the fact that the degenerate disciple does not even sense his failure before men and his uselessness to God. (Cf. Samson, Jdg. 16:20) Luke reports (14:34, 35) this same figure of speech used by Jesus here, but adds this interesting detail: "It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men throw it away." Many things which have become corrupt or decomposed are useful for making fertilizer to throw on the land. But savorless salt is not even of this much use in that it destroys fertility wherever it be thrown. The only place left for it is the roadway where fertility is no problem. Not only useless but also contemptible are those Christians who continue to maintain the forms of godliness but have long ago lost their power. Such a Church deserves to be down-trodden by the heel of men who have not been fooled by her hypocrisy and she will finally be cast out in shame by the very God whose name she claimed to uphold. (Mt. 13:41, 42; Lk. 13:6-9; Rev. 3:1b, 8, 15) The fraudulent, faithless Church or individual member who refuses or neglects his duty to labor to preserve the morality of the community or else is too cowardly or hesitant to meet the great moral issues of the day, not only is contemptible in the eyes of the world, but also undermines future efforts of genuine Christians! Not only is this a failure which is bad enough in itself, but it is a failure which embarrasses the valiant efforts of others.

In view of this fatal moral breakdown which concludes so tragically both in the thwarting of God's determination to use THAT Church or THAT Christian to influence the world, and in the loss of

that Church or member as well as the world they were supposed to save, let us briefly notice some of the warning signals of *salt losing its savor*:

1. When there is a loss of distinction between the Christian and the world he is supposed to save, then real, serious deterioration has begun to set in. This is the chameleon character which is more and more controlled by the environment rather than that clear, courageous ethical sense that sets the pace in terms pleasing sometimes only to God. (Ro. 12:2; I Cor. 15:33) That self-dedicated separation unto God, which is holiness of the highest quality, begins to fade out as more and more evidences of agreement with the world crop up here and there.
2. When we find a Church or Christian that maintains the forms of religion but basically possesses no vital force of internal godliness, then we have encountered savorless salt. These are people who look like Christians, but do not do what Christians are supposed to do. (II Tim. 3:5; Tit. 1:16)
3. Because the purpose of salt is to preserve from corruption every inch of that with which it is brought into contact, a growing indifference toward Christ's first love, the saving of mankind by the preaching of the gospel, is indication of deterioration. (Mt. 9:13; 20:28; 28:18-20; Lk. 19:10; Jn. 12:47; Rev. 2:4, 5)

Other commentaries also mention the seasoning power of salt which renders food more palatable, but the figure breaks down with the question: "palatable to whom?" To God? If so, how did He make out with so little salt before Jesus scattered the sons of the kingdom throughout the earth? To mankind in general? But mankind is not the eater but the meat! To the Christian? But he is the salt, Jesus' meaning probably revolves around the idea of preservation only.

5:14 Ye are the light of the world. Christ Jesus Himself is the only true Light of this world. (Jn. 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46; Mt. 4:16) His disciples, according to Jesus' metaphor here, do not merely reflect His light, but burn as lamps lit from His fire. (Jn. 12:36; Phil. 2:14-16; I Th. 5:4-8; cf. Ro. 2:19) However, we differ from the literal clay lamps filled with oil (5:15) in that we are able

to grow more into His likeness and reflect His glory (II Cor. 3:17—4:6). What do Christians and light have in common?

1. *Light makes sight possible in the darkness.* Darkness is often used in the NT to mean:
 - a. Ignorance which is the lack of opportunity to learn, or the failure to see connections between possessed knowledge and its practical expression: Mt. 4:16; Lk. 1:79; Jn. 9:39; I Jn. 2:11.
 - b. Moral perversity which refuses to admit truth which condemns it: Jn. 3:19, 20; 9:41; 12:37-43; Mt. 6:23; I Jn. 2:8-11.
 - c. The state resulting from ignorance and unwillingness to learn the truth: Lk. 22:53; Jn. 1:5; Ac. 26:18; Ro. 13:12; II Cor. 6:14; Col. 1:13; I Pet. 8:9; I Jn. 1:5, 6.

Some of these passages fuse the concepts, as does Eph. 4:17-19 and II Th. 2:9-12. Some people are in the dark because they are ignorant (Ro. 10:14-17), more because they willfully ignore the light (Ro. 10:1-3), but all are in the dark without Jesus. Therefore, the *light* that is intended to illuminate this darkness is primarily the revelation of God Himself seen in the face of Jesus; secondarily, the disciples of Jesus who are being changed into His glorious likeness from one degree of brilliance to another, becoming thus His kind of light and capable of illuminating as did He. (II Cor. 3:18—4:6; Ro. 12:2; I Jn. 3:2, 3; II Pet. 1:3, 4) As long as He was in the world, Jesus was the Light of the world (Jn. 9:5; cf. 1:4-14), but in His absence He has chosen to enlighten the lost by the testimony of His written word carefully proclaimed by the word and consistent lives of His followers.

The Christian's opportunity to be a teacher of the world lies in his pointing men to Jesus. But to do this he will have to expose men's sins causing them to see their profound need of the Savior. (Eph. 5:3-13) Notwithstanding the obvious necessity to expose man's true nature to him, he just does not enjoy the ghastly picture that the Christian draws of him. The gospel calls evil and worthless almost everything that the worldly man thinks valuable. The world-man can react in one of three ways: he can humble himself and accept his condemnation and be saved to walk in the light too, or he can ignore the gospel claims if the Church is not too insistent and the exposure

of his sins minimal. But if the blazing glory of God radiates from the life of one man of God, disclosing the worldling's wickedness and hypocrisy for all to see, he may smash back at the light, hating the Christian and all that he stands for, doing all in his power to get that light turned off. This may be the very reason why Jesus said "Blessed are the persecuted for my sake" before He said "You are the world's light." Jesus is the Light of the world and our identification with Him may get us killed too.

2. *But light cannot help if not placed in a prominent position. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.* This is just a truism based upon the ancient concept of civil defense. The city and the hill have no particular significance except as the one serves to make the other visible. All Jesus means by this is that the Christian, by the attitudes he shows, by his actions that give meaning to his confession and by his faithful testimony to the gospel, will be a man who stands out in a crowd. Jesus declares: "You just cannot hide the obvious!" 5:15 **Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.** (A popular expression with Jesus: Mk. 4:21; Lk. 8:16; 11:33) The word "bushel" (*modios*) refers to a grain measure somewhat equivalent to our peck measure. At any rate, it is not intended for hiding lighted lamps! *On a hill . . . on the stand:* these phrases bespeak the most advantageous position for performing this greatly needed service. There is no secret discipleship here! To many who would retain much of their life for their own use, this glaringly public confession of Jesus Christ would certainly be regarded as one of the distinct disadvantages of His service. But Jesus will have nothing of covert discipleship. He knows that we are tempted to pretend not to be salt, so as not to irritate the rotting, selfish flesh around us, for such annoyance will mean persecution for us. It is a temptation to scurry about searching for anything that will hide our light, or to wish that our city were not so clearly visible. Here Jesus gently urges His hearers to count the cost of discipleship, for it will mean being in the public eye either for good or for ill. Later He will begin to put the pressure on. (Mt. 10:32, 33; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 14:25-35)

But why must the disciple stand out so publicly even if it means he will be an easy target for abuse? So that lost men may look up and see a Christian standing firm against the storm of life's uncertainties, take courage and rejoice that righteousness and true life

are yet to be had. Why stand? Because some might repent and be saved because of the unadulterated Christian witness of one godly man who dared to stand. Why stand? Because in the message of Christ Christians have wisdom that is indispensable for solving humanity's greatest questions.

5:16 **Even so let your light shine before men.** Paul observes that anything we do is conspicuous to someone whether we wish it so or not. (I Tim. 5:24, 25) Therefore this is not a question of parading our virtues for men's admiring notice nor a conscious effort to display one's self. If the lampstand and the lamp had personality, their every effort and final purpose would not be to present themselves as the best of their kind, but humbly to give the light every advantage to shine brilliantly. But the museum of human history is quite cluttered with the wrecked lives of men and institutions who could not resist the temptation of self-glory. What motives will save the Lord's devotees from the same peril? :

1. The realization that the world, to which we are the light of God, is LOST and grovelling in its darkness. Out of this grasp of the situation will arise so sincere a concern for men's souls that it will permeate our prayers, conduct and conversation and will give us that courageous humility that makes us truly helpful to men without seeking our own glory. Further, if we see the world through Jesus' eyes as it really is: dishonest, corrupt, fickle and incapable of permanent satisfaction, then we will not seek its praise. Rather, we will tend to see through its hollow applause.
2. The true motive of our actions must be **that men may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.** This means simply that the goal of our deeds must be to get them to glorify God because of what they see us do. We will need no bell-ringing or trumpet-blowing to call attention to our religion. Just the sheer novelty of a man practicing exactly what he preaches immediately focuses the world's gaze upon him. People usually begin an immediate and critical inspection of his life to see if he really is all that he would have them become. The world is quick to sense hypocrisy and selfishness in those who profess devotion to the Master. (Study Jn. 3:21; I Tim. 4:12-16;

6:1; Tit. 2:1, 5b, 7, 8, 10, 14; 3:8, 14) And what if they see the opposite of what is pretended? (Ro. 2:17-24) Peter expresses this exhortation so well:

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace; whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (I Pet. 4:10, 11)

3. Study Jesus' method as He let His light shine before men, because when He did His good deeds, God got the glory. (Mt. 9:8; 15:31; Mk. 2:12; Lk. 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15-18; 23:47) The apostles caught this same spirit (Ac. 4:21; 11:18; 21:20; Gal. 1:24), for what they did caused men to return spontaneous praise and thanks to God.

Men might never during their earth-life give God the glory for His power to make such men as these Christians, but the final day of vindication will reveal all and God will be glorified. (I Pet. 2:11, 12; II Th. 1:10-12) Sometimes one's good conduct serves to silence the slander of those who would discredit the Church and her message. (Cf. Tit. 2:7, 8) But this must never turn us aside from the one goal of Jesus, the one important task of man, the ultimate joy of the Church and the consummation of the ages: seeking to turn everything to *the glory of God our Father*. (Jn. 15:8; I Cor. 10:31; II Cor. 9:13; Phil. 1:9-11; I Pet. 2:9)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the three metaphors Jesus used to express the mission or work of the truly wise and godly man.
2. Show how each metaphor expresses some phase of the Christian's character or work.
3. Is it possible that salt should lose its savor? How does a knowledge of Palestinian life help answer this question?
4. What is implied about the nature of "the earth" that makes salt so necessary to its preservation?
5. What is stated and meant about the Christian who has "lost savor"?

6. How may this same meaning be applied to the Church in the same condition in a given geographical area?
7. What is the meaning of "the bushel"?
8. What is the connection between a "city set on a hill" and "a lamp put on the stand"?
9. What is implied about the nature of "the world" that makes light so necessary to its illumination?
10. State Jesus' meaning given in these three metaphors without mentioning either *salt*, *light* or *city*.

C. THE RELATION OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN TO THE LAW (Mt. 5:17-48)

1. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE STANDARD.

TEXT: 5:17-20

17. Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill.
18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.
19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
20. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Describe the righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees and which secures one a place in the kingdom.
- b. Quote several NT Scriptures which state plainly our relation to the Law.
- c. Discuss the relationship between true righteousness in fellowship with God and the keeping of laws. Could God produce righteousness in man by law? What makes you think so? Can true right-

eousness even be described in a code of regulations for conduct? How is conduct controlled in a Christian without his being regulated by law?

- d. What did the law accomplish? What will the Sermon on the Mount accomplish if it too is used as a law or code of conduct without the supernaturally-revealed redemption that is available in Jesus' death and resurrection?
- e. Is the law of any use for Christians today? If so, what use is to be made of it? If the lofty ideals of this Sermon serve to produce the same effect as the law, why did Jesus preach it? Is He laying just another burdensome law upon His disciples that demands absolute perfection? If not, what is the difference?
- f. By His reference to "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished," was Jesus thereby guaranteeing the accuracy of the Old Testament text? Is this a positive declaration that OT is verbally inspired down to the smallest part of the very letters which comprise it?
- g. Why was it so important that Jesus deny His intent to annul the law and prophets?
- h. What do you think is the basis for the distinction Jesus makes between those "who shall be called least" and those "who shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven"?
- i. In v. 19, Jesus speaks of those who break commandments and teach others so, and of those who shall do and teach them, as being considered in some way "in the kingdom of heaven." Now, to what does Jesus refer by that phrase: "in the kingdom"? Does He mean a time or a place or a dispensation or what?
- j. Why should we get all stirred up about seeing to it that our piety surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees? What if it does not?
- k. Who would call them "great" or "least" in the kingdom? (v. 19)

PARAPHRASE

"Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets, for my intention is not to destroy the effect of their witness but to fulfill them to the fullest extent. For truly I say to you that heaven and earth would sooner disappear than that the smallest letter or even a part of a letter pass from the Law until all that must be fulfilled have been fulfilled. The man who breaks or even relaxes the force of one of the minor commandments and teaches others to

do so, shall be least esteemed in the kingdom of God, whereas he who practices and teaches them shall be considered great in God's kingdom. For I tell you that unless your religion is a far better thing than that of your theologians and the Pharisees, you will never even make it into God's kingdom!"

NOTES

I. THE OBLIGATION TO THE OLD

5:17 **Think not that I came . . .** Why was it necessary for Jesus to open this section of His message with this denial? Were some inclined to suppose that Jesus was coming to destroy the Law and prophets?

1. Yes, some viewed the law as an intolerable burden either because of a lack of the spirit of loving obedience to the Father's will (Cf. Isa. 28:13; Amos 8:5), or because of personal painful awareness of sin they might have been caused to hope for greater leniency upon sin in the messianic kingdom. To these Jesus needed to uphold God's unvarying standard that condemns all sin, humbling the former to unqualified repentance while pointing the latter to a righteousness based upon something other than harsh, legal justice.

2. Yes, the jealous religious leaders, their confidence shaken by Jesus' unconventional but obviously true religion and widespread popularity, probably suspected His previous preaching of possessing revolutionary implications which could destroy the existing order and all their carefully-worded interpretations of the Law and prophets. They had so thoroughly confused their traditional interpretations with God's original revelation, that to attack the one was to put the other in doubt. They mutter fearfully, "He's taking the Law into His own hands—and the prophets too!" To this He is answering, "Do not worry about me or what I might do to the Law of God or to His prophets!"

3. In the beatitudes Jesus had contradicted practically every dearly-held tenet of the scribes and Pharisees. In this present section He will make some sweeping criticisms of the OT Law. Because the popular confusion of the voice of the Pharisees with the voice of God, in the minds of His hearers, Jesus would appear to destroy that for which the Pharisees officially stood: the Law and prophets themselves. This denial, therefore, is a most-needed premise to His revolutionary preaching which follows.

I came not to destroy (*katalauein*) i.e. "to do away with, abolish, annul, make invalid, repeal, ruin, bring to an end, defeat." (Arndt-Gingrich, 415) As some of these meanings may appear to be mutually contradictory when applied to the Law, we must determine what Jesus regards as the antithesis or opposite of what He means by "destroy." In Jesus' mind, the antithesis of "destroy" is "fulfill." Thus, He did not come "to ruin, to bring to an end by defeating the purpose of" the Law or prophets, but rather to fulfill them.

Should a pretender to the Messiahship intend to nullify the predictive types in the Law or the predictions of the prophets, how could he ever appeal to their words, as correctly representing God's message relevant to that generation, to justify his claims to be the true Messiah? Again, if Jesus had categorically rejected the Law and repealed it before fulfilling its standard, how could He claim to save men from its guilt and from their responsibility to justify themselves through perfect fulfillment of its standard? God gave the Law and the prophets to indicate the true nature of sin. (Ro. 3:20; 7:13) This is why the Law must remain in force: it has been established as the standard against which those will be judged who will not accept God's leniency through faith in Christ Jesus (Ro. 3:31; Jas. 2:9-11). However, to those who surrender their struggle to be "good enough" by whatever code, to them who are willing to believe Jesus, **ONLY TO THEM** He becomes the end of the Law (Ro. 10:3, 4). The unrelenting, unforgiving Law will stand up at the judgment to condemn all who do not believe Him. (Ro. 2:12). (See below on 5:18.)

I came to fulfill (*the law and the prophets*). "I am the exact meaning of all that God intended to say in the Old Testament!" is Jesus' bold, thrilling claim. Whoever reads the OT without seeing the mighty figure of Christ Jesus, just has not understood what he reads. (Cf. Ac. 8:30-35) Just how did Jesus fulfill the Jewish Scriptures?:

1. Jesus fulfilled the Law's purpose to demonstrate the standard of righteousness by showing Himself to be the perfect Man and all that God had in mind when He originally gave the Law. (Mt. 3:15; Heb. 4:15; 7:26-28; I Pet. 2:22; II Cor. 5:21; Jn. 8:46)
2. Jesus fulfilled the Law's purpose to declare the exceeding sinfulness of sin (Ro. 7:13) by living as a Man above sin,

thus condemning all sin that men commit (Ro. 8:3), thus dissolving all the rationalizations they offer to justify their sinning.

3. Jesus fulfilled the Law's *righteous sentence* by receiving in his own body the execution of the death penalty (I Pet. 2:24; Gal. 3:13).
4. Jesus fulfilled the Law's *patterns and predictions* of the new covenant. He used the Law by pointing to the purpose behind its true history, to its types and prophecies as having exact fulfillment either in Himself or in His messianic rule. (Cf. Lk. 4:21; 24:25-27, 44-47; II Pet. 1:19) Some of its predictions find fulfillment in the Church; others in all that Christ will yet do until the consummation of God's plans at the end of time. (Ac. 3:20, 21)
5. His standard of righteousness requires of His disciples all that was really essential in the Mosaic code (Mt. 22:34-40). Thus, the *spirit and substance* of the Law and prophets will be in effect: love for God and man. This is the real meaning of all of God's will given at any time.

The preceding five points picture Jesus' attitude toward the OT Law as one of complete support and dedication to its true intent. It is also true that . . . :

6. He considered the Old Testament's message as binding in its true, original form upon those to whom it had been given. (Jn. 10:35; Mt. 5:18-20; 8:4; 19:16-20; 22:35-40). To Jesus, faithfulness to God's Word is NOT secondary. God *does* care about what men do with the revelations He gives them of His will.
7. He constantly corrected the Pharisaic concepts and corruptions of the Law and misunderstandings of the prophets, which nullified the force of God's will (Mt. 5:20; 12:1-14; 15:1-20; 23:1-36). To the strict orthodox Jew of the time, service to God was a matter of keeping thousands of man-made rules and regulations handed down from the ancients. These traditions were confused with God's Law which they were intended to clarify, and, more often than not, they contradicted its true intent.

8. Consequently, He viewed as of no consequence the human regulations added by tradition. He cared nothing about the ritual handwashings (Mt. 15:2; Mk. 7:1-5) or the traditional definitions of what constituted "work" on the sabbath (Mt. 12:1, 2, 9, 10).

Therefore, Jesus fulfilled the Law and prophets to the full extent that God had intended.

As stated above, Jesus COULD NOT break by defeating the true intention of the OT without also undermining His own position and mission. To render vital and valid Jesus' salvation from sin, the Law must continue in force to describe and condemn sin. But this cannot mean that Jesus, not having "destroyed" the Law, could not therefore "abrogate, repeal, annul, abolish or render it invalid" after He had fulfilled it. (See in 5:18) Neither does "fulfilling the Law" mean "to perpetuate" its force upon those saved by grace and faith. Though *kataluein*, as indicated above, may mean both "repeal" and "break the force of," yet Jesus did the former and could never do the latter. By His intention to fulfill the Law and prophets, He admitted its God-given authority in full. By His design to set it aside, having completely fulfilled its requirements, He is not failing to acknowledge its importance and authority for those to whom it was given. Rather, He is upholding the Law as a principle of judgment, valid for those who are not willing to be clothed in His righteousness. Nevertheless, His fulfilling the Law was His preparation to abrogate it altogether for those who accept Him.

Jesus did NOT mean that EVERY law of God is binding upon Christians and that the whole of it should be obeyed without regard to important differences in the persons involved. All of God's commands are not addressed to all the race. While it is true that all of God's revealed will, directed to a specific group such as the Jews, the Christians, or the world at large, must be faithfully obeyed by that group, yet it cannot and must not be considered obligatory for those to whom it was not given by God.

Nor by His claiming to "fulfill" the law, does Jesus mean "to give the true meaning of it," or complete what was lacking in the deep, spiritual content or merely reveal all that is implicit in Moses' system. Some hold that Jesus raised the Mosaic standard to spiritual perfection, leaving thus intact Moses' morality with Jesus' more rigid requirements added besides. This could not be His meaning, as the

prophets clearly understood the Law to require heartfelt righteousness that motivated men to love and good works because of their faith in God.

See, for examples, Isa. 1:11-20; 33:14-16; 51:1-9; 52:11; 55; 57:1, 2; 58; 59; 64; 66:1-5; Jer. 7:1-7; 17:9, 10; Hos. 6:6; 10:12; Joel 2:12-14; Amos 5:10-15, 21-24; Micah 6:8; Hab. 2:4; Zech. 7:9-12.

Moses' Law was already directed to men's hearts! (Dt. 4:8, 29; 5:29; 6:5, 6; 8:2, 5; 10:12, 16; 11:13-18, 32; 26:16; 28:47; 30:2, 6, 10-14; 32:46; Psa. 37:31; 40:6-8; 119:11, 172; 19:7-14) Jesus came not to give His disciples another law, the same in kind as the Mosaic system, but to give them a new nature which could help them to rise to moral heights unapproachable under law.

II. THE OMINOUS OVERTURE TO THE OVERTHROW OF THE OBSOLETE

5:18 **The Law** does not here refer only to the Torah, i.e. merely the legal requirements, but also the prophets who are its God-sent interpreters. Jesus means the Law in its broader sense of every part of the OT, prophecy and command.

To paraphrase Jesus another way: "The Law and prophets mean more to me than all the destiny of the universe! Every little item in them will be carried out."

According to Jesus, there are two points that must be reached before even the smallest part of the total Law could be forgotten:

1. **Till heaven and earth pass away.** How does Jesus intend this?
 - a. Literally? "Until the end of time"? This interpretation seems to overlap the second point to be reached. (See 2 below.)
 - b. Proverbially? "It would be easier for the universe to crumble than for God's Law and prophets to fail of their intended purpose and fulfillment." Compare Luke's wording, 16:17. According to Jesus, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35); i.e. it applied to those under its authority and could not be abrogated or annulled by them or by anyone without God's express mandate.

2. **Till all things be accomplished**, i.e. until God's purpose for giving them had been fulfilled. Since God's purpose is fulfilled in Jesus and His Church, some of the details may yet be in the process of completion clear down to the end of time. Certainly, God's judgment against sinners who reject Jesus will be upheld by God's unchanging Law, for the vindication of God's righteousness at the last day.

But with reference to believers, all things have already been (actually or potentially) accomplished by Jesus, for He set in motion, either in His life, message, suffering, glorification, Church or His glorious reign, all those principles which would accomplish all of God's OT predictions and standards. No wonder Paul shouts to the Greco-Jewish world, "God is the source of life in Christ Jesus, whom He has made to be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption!" (I Co. 1:30) Look at all Jesus did! (Ro. 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 7:4; 9:1-11, 32; 10:4; I Cor. 15:24-47; II Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:13; 4:4, 5; Eph. 1:3-14; 3:8-12; Col. 1:12-23; 2:3, 10)

During His ministry, Jesus hinted at the complete abrogation of the Law (See Mk. 7:19 in contrast with Lev. 11; Jn. 4:21 contrasted with Dt. 12:1-44). But after He had *accomplished all things* that were written in the Law and prophets that required fulfillment (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-48; Ac. 3:18, 22-26; 13:17-40; 26:22), Jesus, whose very Spirit inspired their writings (I Pet. 1:10, 11; 3:18-20), could do with them as He chose. What He actually did is revealed in long treatises on this subject: Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, with much clear teaching in II Corinthians 3; Colossians 2 and Ephesians 2.

Feel the impact of these specific, revealing texts: Ac. 13:38, 39; 15:10, 28; Ro. 3:19-23; 6:7, 14; 7:4, 6; 8:1-4; 10:3, 4; II Cor. 3:1-14; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:10, 11, 21, 24, 25; 5:1-4, 18; 6:15; Eph. 2:14, 15; Col. 2:14-16; Heb. 7:12, 18, 19; 8:1-12; 9:15-17; 10:1-4, 9.

Having fulfilled the Law perfectly, Jesus abolished it. The man who is justified by faith in Jesus has no relationship to the Law and must never try to justify himself before God by ANY law!

But why bring up the question of a Christian's relationship to the Law in a discussion of Jesus' relation to it? Simply because of the great and lasting harm that has been wrought in the Church

because of the misconceptions that so many have about what Jesus actually did to the principle of law. Textually deprived of the Mosaic Law by such passages as those cited above, men have sought to write thousands of other laws whereby they might be able to justify themselves and judge others. Some have even viewed the NT Scriptures as another law, somehow higher and better than that of Moses, but nevertheless, law. But by saying, "I came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill," does Jesus mean to uphold forever a system which His own apostles will later declare invalid and incapable of ever making man right before God?

Not one jot or tittle shall pass away from the law: the Law shall most certainly stand (Greek double negative: *ou mé parelibê*). This is the obvious meaning of Jesus' allusions to the smallest Hebrew letter, the "jodh," and to the little stroke of the pen that would differentiate one Hebrew letter from another of similar appearance. In our alphabet the "tittle" would make the difference between, for example, "c" and "e" or between "G" and "C". Jesus means, simply, "the most minimal part of the Law," and not the verbal inspiration of the smallest part of the very letters that comprise the OT.

One important reason for this conclusion is the absence of the original autograph copies to whose letters this interpretation would refer. The written form of the Law and prophets which would have existed in Jesus' time would have been either in Hebrew copies made from the long-lost originals, or else in copies of translations made from the copies of the originals. Today, it is a gigantic task to compare available Hebrew manuscripts with their early translations to arrive at the most nearly perfect reproduction of the original wording. But no editor could truly say that his edition of the Hebrew Bible is verbally inspired down to the smallest letters or parts of letters.

What does the Law accomplish that makes it so important to Jesus?

1. In the work which it accomplished in preparation for Jesus' coming:
 - a. The Law preserved law and order for a time until God's purposes for the Jewish people could reach fruition. It was intended to provide an outward control of their conduct,

even if it could not convert their lawless hearts. (Cf. I Tim. 1:8-11; Gal. 3:19, 23-25; Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 34:40)

- b. The Law and the prophets, whose works explained God's true intent in the Law, identify the Savior and His system. (Ac. 3:17-25; 8:35; 10:43; 13:16-41)
 - c. The Law furnished a vocabulary and a thought framework for Jesus' revelation of God and His salvation.
2. In the function it continues to carry out:
- a. The Law condemns sin by showing the heinous nature of rebellion against God and the dire need of salvation on some other basis than law. (Ro. 5:20; 7:7-14; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10)
 - b. The Law, by its inability to give life and righteousness, demands a different arrangement of a new covenant. (Heb. 7:19; 8:7; 10:1-4; Gal. 3:21) It shows for all ages the incapacity of law, as a principle of giving right-standing with God, to make men right.
 - c. The Law, not having been abrogated for those who reject Jesus' cross, provides the standard of condemnation. (Ro. 12:15; Gal. 5:3, 4; Jas. 2:8-13; Ac. 13:39)

III. OBEDIENCE IS OBVIOUSLY OBLIGATORY

5:19 **Whosoever therefore shall break.** *Therefore* announces the first practical application of the principle that God's Law and prophets must have complete fulfillment, vv. 17, 18. *Break* (*lueim*) has about the same breadth of meaning as *katalueim*, "destroy" of 5:17 (Arndt-Gingrich, 485). However, Jesus refers not so much to that open disobedience or unblushing defiance of God's government as to all the compromising and shrewd evasion of the force of God's commands by those who profess to serve God. There are many ways to "loose or untie" (*lueim*) one from his obligation to the Law: through ignorant or wrong interpretations, by deliberate manipulation of the Law for selfish or ulterior motives, by cunningly devised rationalizations and justifications adopted as a means of escaping the guilt of violation. This subtle spirit of disobedience seeks to realize its desires just like the openly sinful, but it always maintains a cloak of respectability

and superficial piety continually stretched to cover every act. This is the same attitude toward God's will that keeps a person from rendering whole-hearted allegiance and service to God and satisfies him with external piety that passes for purity.

One of these least commandments. Who said that some commands are less important than others? The Pharisees? Jesus? If so, what did they mean?

1. The Pharisees were experts at this sort of dodging moral responsibility by demoting commands of supreme and essential importance so that they might be ignored as trivial offences, while giving top priority to clearly secondary issues. (See Mt. 15:1-20; 23:16-23) In this case, Jesus may be admitting their terminology while condemning their use of it. If so, He is indicting them with encouraging people to presume that little disobedience to God is unimportant, or that violation of less important commands was only a trivial matter.
2. However, even if Jesus were not accomodating His language to Pharisaic distinctions to make His point, yet it is quite true that there are "weightier matters of the law" that dwarf all the rest by comparison. (Mt. 23:23; cf. 9:13; 12:1-12) While anything God commands is obligatory to those of whom He requires it, Jesus does not view every command as of the same importance. For instance, the ceremonial laws of the Mosaic code would be considered of certainly less importance than love, justice, mercy and faith. (Cf. Mt. 9:13; 22:34-40)
3. Though the Christian must not view his relation to God as a legal contract, yet for those in Jesus' audience who so view it, He reminds that the authority of the Law is defied just as much by the violation of a "least commandment" as by a "greater" one. (Jas. 2:8-11) By this fact all are damned as sinners and must be saved by God's grace! (Ro. 1-3)

He shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

The *kingdom* does not refer to that kingdom of glory where the saints will see the Father's face, but that kingdom about which Jesus has already taught much in Galilee (Mt. 4:17, 23) and would yet explain more clearly (11:11-14; 13:1-52; 16:18, 19, 28) which found its immediate and practical application in the Church. Jesus' expression regards two viewpoints:

1. *The present condition of His bearers in view of the future.* Men who show little reverence for the present revelation of God, as represented in the Law and prophets, would have the same disregard for further revelation brought in the kingdom by the Messiah. (Cf. Lk. 16:27-31; Jn. 5:38-47) "If you act this way now, before the kingdom comes, your habits of disobedience will not easily be laid aside and will carry over with you into that epoch when the kingdom becomes a reality."

2. *The future attitudes in the kingdom considered as already realized.* After the Church becomes a reality, those members who regard God-appointed commands as non-essentials and neglect them and urge others to follow suit, will be the least esteemed in the kingdom. Though they had entered the kingdom by accepting Christ, they might be slighting His authority on some questions. (Mt. 28:20; Act. 20:20, 27)

Who will be making this judgment? *They shall be called least* by whom? Jesus here declares His own verdict: "In my kingdom I will consider those who do this as nobodies, as teachers who do not know what they are talking about." Christians, following their Lord's sentence, must evaluate would-be leaders on the same basis. (Cf. I Tim. 1:37)

Why is this judgment necessary? Because those who hold that some of God's commands can be ignored with impunity, are fundamentally eroding the conscience and undermining God's authority or right to command. Any unconscientiousness in small matters opens psychological doors to indifference toward greater. (Cf. I Tim. 1:5, 6, 19)

Observe carefully the emphasis and order Jesus uses as He describes insignificance or greatness in the kingdom: "(1) Whosoever vitiates a small part of God's revelation and (2) teaches men so . . . (1) Whosoever practices and (2) teaches . . ." The practice usually and quite naturally precedes the teaching. Psychologically, it could not be otherwise. No teacher is capable of convincing others of that of which he himself is not the first example. (Cf. I Tim. 4:6, 7, 11-16) Jesus will have much to say about the hypocrites who try to teach while not having the character they expect from others. The truly great, in Jesus' holy eyes, are those *who do and teach*. But greatness in the kingdom is measured by conscientiousness, not punctiliousness, in regard to its least commands. Jesus is not blessing that strict devotion to forms and ceremonies which He condemns in the Pharisees.

Rather, He encourages that heart which eagerly does anything God says and joyfully urges others to follow suit, to seek true greatness by continuing to obey just as they are already doing. (I Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9)

IV. THE ORDER TO OUTSTRIP THE OFFICIAL ORTHODOXY

5:20 "Unless you are better men than the orthodox theological doctors demand, you will not make it into my kingdom! Sin and transgression do matter: righteousness in my kingdom is no secondary issue. In fact, it is so important that entrance is prohibited to those who are no closer to God than the most religious people you can think of!"

Your righteousness is your view about what you think constitutes true righteousness. This, in turn, affects your dedication to God and modifies your character. One's attitude toward God's standards is reflected in his character and conduct and incisively affects his obedience. This would naturally come to the mind of the thoughtful. But another series of steps must be taken before Jesus' revelation of the true nature of righteousness will be complete:

1. Men are just not good enough, on the basis of legal justification, to merit entrance into the Kingdom. (Ro. 2:12; 3:9-23; 11:32; Gal. 2:16; 5:3, 4; 6:13)
2. Only Jesus fulfilled the Law's demands, thereby providing God's gracious opportunity for men to be declared righteous on the basis of faith in Him. (Mt. 5:17, 18; Ro. 3:24-26; 8:1-4; Gal. 3:10; Eph. 2:8, 9)
3. Man must surrender, therefore, his struggle to be good enough to satisfy God's Law, and he must accept Jesus' righteousness as his. (Ro. 4:5—5:1; 6:1-11; I Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:4-16)
4. Imputed righteousness is valid only where the faith is real. (Ro. 1:17; 11:20-23)
5. Faith is only genuine where the conduct demonstrates its vitality. (Jas. 1:22-25; 2:14-26; Gal. 5:6)
6. Imputed righteousness is only of value to the man whose whole being is transformed and made truly good by God's Spirit working from within, rather than God's Law coercing him from without. (Ro. 6:12-22; 7:6; 12:2; I Cor. 6:9-11; II Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 4:19; 5:18; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:27, 28)

7. The man who depends upon his personal goodness, established on the basis of so many good works and so much obedience to law, is damned. (Ro. 3:19, 20, 31; 4:15; 7:7-24; 10:1-4; Gal. 3:10; 5:4)

Therefore, imputed righteousness is the only righteousness which truly excels that of the scribes and Pharisees, but it must be backed by a righteous character which responds to God's grace. These tremendous concepts are uniquely Christian and probably would have never crossed the mind of man had not Jesus and His apostles taught them. But they are absolutely necessary, logical conclusions if one uses as a point of departure "perfect fulfilment of the Law and the prophets," (5:17, 18) or the very perfection of God Himself (5:48).

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The *scribes* were the acknowledged expounders of the Law because of their particular familiarity with its contents as the "men of letters" (*grammateus*) of that day. Their life-work consisted in the study and interpretation of the Law: they were the "lawyers" (Cf. Mt. 22:35 with Mk. 12:28; Lk. 11:52, 53). They were the rabbis, the cream of Jewish scholarship in that period. (Cf. Mt. 2:4; 7:29; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1; 16:21; 17:10; 21:15; 23:2ff; Mk. 12:35, 38ff) The *Pharisees* were that Jewish party which professed scrupulous adherence to all the legal requirements of the Law as interpreted by the scribes. But why bring them into the argument? They made a valuable point of reference, since, in the eyes of the people and especially in their own sight, they were the very models of righteousness. As such, they represented the strictest type of Judaism. Not only that, but they also picture for us the strictest legal interpreters of the highest moral law known to man. They should therefore be the purest among men; at least, this was their own ideal. This declaration of Jesus must have hit hard, since all were agreed: "If a Pharisee or a scribe be not the first to enter the kingdom, who would?" Here again, Jesus contradicts the popular concept, not only of His day, but of every age: "Unless your religion excels that of the best men on earth you know, the doors of the kingdom are closed to you!"

But what was the so-called *righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees*? Surely Jesus does not accept their own estimate of themselves. Their religiosity and real character may be learned from these suggestive passages: (Mt. 23; cf. 9:11, 34; 12:1-45; 15:1-20; 16:1-12, 21; 21: 33-45; Lk. 12:1; 15:2; 16:14; 20:45-47) From these we see their:

1. Ostentatious piety and frequent hypocrisy.
2. Punctilious regard for ceremonial law.
3. Frequent, monstrous neglect of moral law.
4. Consequent harshness in judging others.
5. Contempt for the masses of the people; partisan zeal; pride. (Cf. Jn. 7:48, 49)
6. Convenient evasions and distinctions used to satisfy their conscience in matters of duty whereby they would have been bound by the Law to obey.
7. Miserable failure in attaining the righteousness which God expects in those who would enter His kingdom (Ro. 10:1-3). At least theoretically, it is possible to satisfy the demands of law, so that man can say, "I have discharged my duty to the Law," but it is impossible to satisfy the claims of love that go far beyond the requirements of any law.

In short, their "righteousness" was LEGAL. But that was its fault, and that very attitude toward God's standard produced the aberrations listed above. The tragedy lies in their apparent sincerity in supposing that such conduct constitutes true piety. They were satisfied with the superficial. Point for point, our religion must be far superior to this: it must emanate from a pure heart; render humble, useful service; demonstrate loving, conscientious obedience in all things; possess a fear of God and a consciousness of one's own imperfections; be merciful and moderate; and, really love men.

But if Jesus refers not to their actual and practical impiety revealed in the above seven points, then He is taking them at their ideal as exponents of any and all legal systems, and declares that His disciples must possess a righteousness that surpasses the righteousness demanded by law. This "surpassing righteousness" obviously must be imputed to the sinner on the basis of his faith in Jesus.

Ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. In the strongest language possible (Greek double negative emphatic: *ou mê eiselhête*) Jesus denies entrance into the kingdom to those of the same brand of religion as the Jewish leaders. But here a problem arises: is He demanding moral and spiritual maturity before one may become a citizen of His kingdom? May only the absolutely perfect enter there? Two answers are possible:

1. It would not have taken much for almost any sincere Jew to be a far better man than the conventional rabbi, as described above. In fact, Jesus found expressions of true faith that ran deep (Mt. 8:10-12; 11:7-15, 25; 13:16, 51, 52; 15:21-28; 16:13-19; 19:13-15), deeper understanding of the nature of real righteousness (Mt. 12:28-34), and love stronger than fear (Mk. 15:43-45; Lk. 7:36-50; Jn. 19:25, 26). Thus, any humble disciple of Jesus, whose mind was open to teaching and could be brought to repentance, already possessed a far superior religion than his leaders. (Psa. 119:98-100) According to this interpretation, Jesus is not requiring absolute perfection but only a heart relatively more righteous or more genuinely dedicated to God than the heart of the theologians.
2. Only the absolutely perfect may enter Jesus' kingdom. This would keep us all out, unless Jesus can remake us! But that is exactly what He intends to do through our new birth and regeneration. It is no longer a question of taking the infinitely long stairway to ultimate perfection, on which we are always imperfect at any point. Rather, we may take the elevator of Christ's righteousness clear to the top and be considered perfectly righteous from the very beginning of our new life in Christ! (Ro. 8:4; I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:10)

Verses 21-48 are but illustrations how Jesus' disciple may rise infinitely higher than the piety of these petty scholars. But there is by no means agreement among the commentaries regarding Jesus' purpose for giving these illustrations.

JESUS' PURPOSE

What does Jesus intend to accomplish in these following verses? (Mt. 5:21-48)

A. TO CORRECT POPULAR FALSE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE LAW?

Not a few commentators do not hesitate to declare that Jesus is distinguishing the false and inadequate though popular teachings of the scribes regarding the meaning of the Law from its true meaning. Thus, the positive declarations made by Jesus (5:21-48) only reveal the true implications of each legal precept treated. This view suggests that Jesus is expounding what God intended for the

Israelites to understand when He gave each precept and prohibition to them at the beginning. By logical extension, any wise and godly Hebrew could have arrived at the same understanding of the Law expressed by Jesus in this Sermon on the Mount. In fact, many of the Proverbs attest such an understanding. In this case, what is Jesus revealing that is really unique and new? Again, is it always necessary or even possible to prove that Jesus is objecting to some erroneous interpretation or mistaken application popular among the scribes? (See Notes on 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43 which offer the opposite conclusion.) The view of the commentators assumes that Jesus COULD NOT be drawing a contrast between His standard and the Law of Moses without, first, contradicting His declared purpose not to defeat the purpose of the Law and prophets (vv. 17, 18), and, second, appearing to contrast His teachings with the moral principles of His Father or "correcting God." In regard to the first objection, see above on 5:17, 18; as to the second, see below under letter "B." Further, is Jesus the exponent of merely "legal righteousness" and not rather of "fulfilling and surpassing righteousness"?

The basis for this opinion that Jesus corrects the scribal misinterpretations of the Law, as offered by many commentators, is the introductory phrase He uses to open His examples: "Ye have heard that it was said." It is argued that since His usual manner of citing the Law is "It is written," therefore, what He cites in 5:21-48 could not be the Law, but must be only what was said, i.e. the oral traditions of the elders and rabbis. But this opinion seems to be weak at the following points:

1. This opinion, followed even by many who are usually capable of distinguishing the covenants, seems to be motivated by an over-weighing desire to retain "the moral law of God" as a standard for justification. To demonstrate the existence of "the moral law of God," they cite certain precepts of the Mosaic system upon which Jesus comments. Thus, they suppose that Moses' ethics, as interpreted by Jesus, to be the epitome of real righteousness. But Jesus claims to be presenting a concept of morality that far surpasses the highest legal ideals.
2. The introductory phrase ("ye have heard that it was said") may just as easily refer, not to the late scribal authorities, but to those ancient patriarchal mores which preceded the

Mosaic legislation and were regulated or modified by it or simply included in it. (Cf. Jn. 7:22):

- a. Laws regarding murder and punishment were known to the ancients (Cf. Gen. 4:14, 15 with Num. 35:19, Gen. 9:5, 6).
 - b. God's revelation against sexual sins such as adultery was known (Gen. 12:10-19; 20:2-18; 26:7-11; 39:9).
 - c. The basic philosophy behind swearing and oaths was already formed before the Law (Gen. 14:22, 23; 21:22-31; 24:2-9; 47:29-31; 50:24).
 - d. Retaliation arising from a sense of wounded family honor was practiced (Gen. 34:1-31) or arising from a sense of human value (Gen. 4:14, 15).
 - e. Love of one's neighbor was shown in practical oriental courtesy (Gen. 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 23:1-16) as well as concern for others (Gen. 18:16-33).
3. Further, the suggestion that "It is written" is Jesus' usual formula for introducing a citation (18 times not counting synoptic duplications) proves nothing about Jesus' habits, since these are learned from the evidence, which also contains other modes equally clear. (Mt. 9:13; 12:3-8; 13:14; 15:4 [Mk. 7:10], 7; 19:4, 5, 18, 19; 21:4, 16, 42) Certainly Jesus said "It is written" many times, even in the synoptic parallels of some of these passages cited, but what does this prove about His meaning in those passages in which He does not? Does it prove that these latter texts are not, therefore, scripture? Or does it prove that He is not citing Scripture when He said "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time"? No.

Even though Edersheim (*Life*, I, 538) and others affirm that the expression "they of old" corresponds perfectly to the rabbinic appeal to those that had preceded, the *Zegeim* or *Risbonim* (the "elders" or "the ancients"), yet these same Hebrew words may refer equally well to those which preceded even Moses' day, or else to those "who were his contemporaries to whom he spoke. For example of *Zegeim*, see Gen. 50:7; Ex. 3:16, 18; 4:29 etc. Josh. 24:31; for *Risbonim*, see Dt. 19:14; Lev. 26:45.

4. Then it is said that the illustrations (5:21-48) are indications as to how Christian righteousness supercedes "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." (5:20) But the view taken in this study is that such a position is inadequate if it only correct the false or inadequate interpretations of the Law and somehow *leave the Law intact*. We should rather take the illustrations (5:21-48) as indications as to how Christian righteousness goes beyond all legal ideals of which the Mosaic code is the chief example. If Jesus' ideal goes beyond that of Moses, it certainly supercedes that standard of the rabbis.

B. TO REVEAL TRUE (AS CONTRASTED TO LEGAL) RIGHTEOUSNESS?

In this view, He proceeds to contrast the old time views of morality, as represented in the true teaching of the Mosaic Law, with the true righteousness as represented in His message. Far from contradicting Moses or correcting God or causing one of the minutest points of the Law to fall, Jesus' contrast, indicated in the phrase "but I say unto you," means, "Do not suppose that all of righteousness is bound up in Moses' Law and interpreted by the prophets. For real righteousness is a much higher standard, a more far-reaching ethic than that dictated by God to Moses for the exigencies of a primitive people. Yes, God still hates murder, adultery, divorce, false swearing and partiality, but there is more to what constitutes sin than just that. Moses' Law could not possibly touch the actual disposition of the heart like the searching judgments I am about to announce. True righteousness not only fulfills the requirements of Moses and the prophets clear to the limit of their intended meaning, but also so far excels them that you will be able to see revealed the perfections of the very character of God Himself! (Cf. 5:48) The standard that I am presenting condemns as sin those wicked heart motives which never emerge as visible deeds. I want to show you that a man is not truly pure until he never desires to do a forbidden thing!"

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Jesus' relation to the Old Testament and His attitude toward it. What use did He make of the OT? Cite His statements about it. Was He superior or inferior to its institutions? Explain His purpose to destroy, fulfill or abrogate it.

2. What is the distinction in Jesus' mind between "destroying the law and prophets" and "fulfilling them"? In what ways would it be possible to "destroy" them? In what way "fulfill" them?
3. What are the "jot" and the "tittle"? What does He mean by them?
4. Does Jesus contemplate the actual destruction of "heaven and earth" as the time when the minutest particulars of the law would finally cease to be in force and all things would be accomplished?
5. What are those things that must be accomplished?
6. Have they been completed yet, as far as the Christian is concerned? If so, how or when?
7. Have they been accomplished yet, as far as the world is concerned? If so, how and when?
8. Describe the "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" and show point by point how our righteousness must exceed it.
9. Who made the distinction between "one of these least commandment" and those which by implication are greater? Jesus? the Pharisees? Explain your answer.

C. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO THE LAW

2. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD ANGER OR HATE.

TEXT: 5:21-26

21. Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement:
22. but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.
23. If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee,
24. leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art with him in the way; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.
26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou have paid the last farthing.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Must a Christian deplore all forms of taking human life? Why?
- b. Must a Christian support the punishment of crime, even if it means the death penalty to the criminal? Why?
- c. Can Jesus' principle ("hate in the heart equals the act of murder") be applied to society in general? If so, how? If not, why?
- d. Does Jesus' principle remove the necessity of law for the Christian?
- e. Does His principle remove the necessity of law for the unconverted?
- f. Is it ever right to be angry? What is the difference between what is called "righteous indignation" and that anger here condemned by Jesus?
- g. What happens to men who allow themselves to be controlled by anger or hate?
- h. Is there any kind of order intended in Jesus' description of the three sins? ("anger," "racah," "fool") What makes you think so?
- i. Who is capable of judging these heart motivations that do not lead to outward, observable sin?
- j. By His phrase: "but I say unto you," is Jesus proceeding to reveal the real intent of Moses' law as one which condemned the heart's motivations as well as the outward act? Or, is He proceeding to reveal the nature of true righteousness as contrasted to the standards God gave through Moses? Explain your answer.
- k. Why, do you suppose, did Jesus word His encouragement to be reconciled in these words: "and there you remember that your brother has something against you"? Show His wisdom in dealing with human nature as it is.
- l. Why is it so important to "settle out of court"?

PARAPHRASE

"You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Do not commit murder' and 'Anyone who murders shall be answerable to the court.' But I say to you that if anyone harbors malice against his brother, he must stand trial in court! Whoever heaps contempt upon his

brother, must answer for it to the Sanhedrin! If anyone so much as says, 'You stupid fool!' he shall have to answer for it in Gehenna's fiery pit!

"So, if you are presenting your offering at the great altar in the temple, and if at that moment of confessing your sins upon the head of that animal, you remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your sacrifice right there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother. Then come back and present your gift.

"Come to terms quickly with your opponent at law while you are going to court with him, lest he turn you over to the judge and he, in turn, deliver you to the guard who will throw you into the prison. Believe me, you will never get out of there till you have paid up in full!"

SUMMARY

While the Law condemns only murder, Jesus condemns the heart's motives which flare up in selfish anger, scorn and reviling speech. One can go to hell for what he thinks, not merely for what he does. Reconciliation with an offended brother is more important than any act of worship. It is better to be reconciled and settle out of court.

NOTES

I. HARBORING HATRED IN THE HEART

5:21 **Ye have heard** both from your parents (Dt. 6:6-9) and from the public reading of the Law and prophets (cf. Ac. 15:21) **that it was said** by God through Moses and the prophets. Some suppose that Jesus' primary reference is to the scribal interpretations, but Jesus does not quote one in this entire section. Jesus is citing the Law as spoken **to the ancients** and makes no allusion to the relatively recent concepts of the rabbis that had arisen since the last of the great prophets and before John the Baptist. **Thou shalt not kill** (Ex. 20:13) This precept covered only murder with malice, not just any form of killing, since capital punishment was meted out to the murderer. Nor was this command a prohibition of war, since God deputized Israel to execute His justice upon many wicked nations. (Dt. 7; 20:10-18) Nor did this prohibition keep God from scourging Israel when they had sinned away their days of grace, by bringing the murderous hordes of enemy armies. (Dt. 28) **Whoever shall**

kill shall be in danger of the judgment. This is no scribal or traditional interpretation as some assume, but a quite correct summation of several laws, since, historically, *the judgment* of a local court had to decide the acquittal or death sentence. (Ex. 21:12-14; Lev. 24:17, 21)

5:22 **But I say unto you:** see on 5:20 "Jesus' Purpose." Jesus rises majestically above the authority of the scribes and Pharisees who could only cite some ancient Jewish scholar, or at best, Moses himself, to verify the orthodoxy of their teachings. Jesus' word surpasses that of the greatest Lawgiver of the ages.

In danger of the judgment . . . council . . . hell of fire. These three tribunals, before which a man is liable to render account, are:

1. The local municipal court made up of the town elders (Dt. 16:18-20; 19:11-13; Num. 35:15-32; Josh. 10:1-9; II Chron. 19:4-7).
2. The Sanhedrin, or supreme court, which heard cases in Jerusalem. (Dt. 17:9-13; 19:15-21[?]; II Chron. 19:8-11)
3. God's fiery hell. He is the only One who can destroy soul and body in Gehenna (Mt. 10:28; Lk. 12:4, 5). *Gehenna* is a word with a terrible history, being the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Ge-Hinnom" or "valley of Hinnom" (II Kg. 23:10; II Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:31, 32; 19:1-13) By the time of the NT era, the phrase had come to mean "the place of final, eternal punishment." (Mt. 5:29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 3:43, 45, 47; 9:47, 48; Lk. 12:5; Jas. 3:6)

But why would Jesus list three separate courts of unequal jurisdiction as having to hear cases where no "crime" has been committed? Lenski (218, 219) suggests that Jesus is satirizing the casuistic method of the scribes and Pharisees. But more probably He is speaking ironically and satirizing the necessarily casuistic method of all law. This is obvious from the sheer impossibility for any human court to execute such judgments as are called for by sinful heart motives, such as selfish anger which is allowed to boil slowly in one's heart. What court on earth could call witnesses to testify regarding a man's very thoughts that never produce specific acts which the Law has defined to be sin?

Even the Mosaic Law condemned *barred* (Num. 35:20, 21; Lv. 19:14, 17; Dt. 19:4-13; 25:3). But as will be seen from these passages, the hater could not be touched until he committed open violence.

Because men cannot rightly judge motivation, it becomes obvious that Jesus regards God as the only qualified judge before whose court men must stand.

Having seen that there is no necessary gradation in the courts before which the sinner must stand, since God is the Judge of all sin, it may be asked if there is an ascending order intended by those sentiments which bring the man into judgment. Some see the following order as representing an increasing intensity and consequently heavier liability:

1. Silent, harbored anger that is allowed to fester without expression;
2. Railing speech, slanderous epithets, contempt, despising;
3. Bitter reproach or invective probably involving cursing.

These may be good interpretations of "anger," "racah" and "fool," but does Jesus intend us to understand that sins may be thus graded as to their seriousness and consequent punishment?

True, punishment will be meted out in varying degrees, according to the differing degrees of guilt. (Mt. 11:20-24; Lk. 12:47, 48; 23:34; Ac. 17:30; Ro. 2:9; 3:26; 5:13; 7:13; 14:23; Eph. 4:18) This lightens the responsibility for no one, since these passages teach the most exact weighing of knowledge, opportunities and motives. Judgement therefore is not to be varied on the basis of the relative seriousness of the sins committed, but on the basis of the quantity of light against which any sin was committed.

No, Jesus' purpose in mentioning three kinds of negative human passion is not to distinguish greater and lesser sins and clarify their respective punishments with a view to making better lawyers of His disciples. After all, He does not exhaust the list of all possible negative outbursts which would represent the various possible infractions of the law. Rather, He utilizes the language familiar to His day, rapidly firing three examples that will render as vivid and emphatic as possible the idea that all forms of hatred are sinful because they are out of harmony with His spirit.

Every one who is angry with his brother. Anger is an important emotion, significant because of what man can do with it, and what it can do with the man. God infused into man this ability to be angry in order to provide him emotional force against evil. ISBE notes (3113) that a man who is incapable of being angry at sin is at the same time thereby adjudged to be incapable of having a real love for righteousness. For instance, how can we look upon man's inhumanity to his fellows without indignation? How could we really be concerned for the least, the last and the lost unless we had the capacity for anger at that which reduces them to what they are? So thought-provoking and soul-searching is this injunction of Jesus that a scribe, while copying the manuscript of Matthew, inserted after the word "angry" the expression "without cause." But He probably did not say it and the addition has been eliminated from all the versions based upon the oldest, best manuscripts. Even so, the unmodified word of Jesus refers to an improper anger which admits the reality of an anger that is quite in order:

1. *Proper Anger:*

- a. The wrath of *God*: Dt. 6:15; 29:22-28; Psa. 7:9-17; 78:38; Nah. 1:2-8; Jn. 3:36; Ro. 1:17; 2:5-9; 5:9; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; Heb. 12:29; 10:29, 31; I Pet. 1:17; II Pet. 3:10; Rev. 11:18; 14:9-11, 19; 19:15. Compare these passages which show God's reluctance to become angry: Psa. 103:8; 30:5; 145:8; Neh. 9:17; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18; Nah. 1:3.
 - b. *Jesus' Anger*: Psa. 2:12; Mk. 3:5
 - c. Proper *human* anger: that quality inherent in a noble character which is stirred deeply about human wickedness. (Ex. 32:19; Num. 16:15; I Sam. 11:6; 20:34; Neh. 5:6; Psa. 97:10; Prov. 8:13; Amos 5:15; Ro. 12:9; Eph. 4:26.) It is this latter passage of Paul that warns of the danger inherent in anger: while angry a man could very well sin against his neighbor. Even justifiable anger might lead one to commit unjustifiable acts which are to be condemned. So Jesus warns us of . . .
2. *Improper Anger* (See Special Study on *Temptations*, 4:1-11, under "A Matter of Desire.") If anger be the emotional expression of a basic drive (desire or instinct) to preserve self or preserve whatever is considered worthy, then it can be harnessed and used as a power for good by an intelligent

choice to be motivated by another more impelling drive or desire. For example, if I love people, even though I am angry with them, how can I sin against them? Conversely, without this intelligent, willed control, I face the situation which excites my anger and begin to lash back, trying to punish those who have thus excited me. My selfish sense of injury masters me. Depending upon the intensity of the excitement, I strike out in words or blows or even hope to kill the object of my anger which has now become a furious rage verging on madness. If I love myself more than others, when angry with them, how can I keep from sinning against them?

What does the Bible say about this kind of anger? See Gen. 4:5, 6; Num. 20:10, 11(?); 35:20, 21; Lev. 19:14, 17; Dt. 19:4-13; 25:3; Psa. 37:8 esp. in context; Prov. 15:1, 18; 16:32; 19:11, 19; 21:14; 27:4; 29:22; 30:33; Lk. 9:51-55; Ro. 12:19; Gal. 5:19, 20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; I Th. 2:8; Tit. 1:7; Jas. 1:19, 20.

Thus, to the complacent soul that confidently purrs, "Oh, but Jesus, I've never killed anybody!" Jesus shows that God's views with respect to human life are so demanding that even selfish anger is to be punished. Whether it be that malicious hatred that explodes in passionate violence or smolders in coals of hate, waiting for the moment to retaliate, all selfish anger is condemned.

But how can the conscientious soul tell the difference between holy and unholy anger? Seek to learn the true origin and the final purpose of the anger in question:

1. What is its origin?
 - a. Pride, self-realization?
 - b. Desire to injure the object of the anger?
 - c. Enraged selfishness?
 - d. Love of righteousness?
 - e. Hatred for sin?
 - f. Zeal for the honor of God and His kingdom?
2. What does this anger make you want to do?
 - a. Seek the injury of the person or thing that has excited you?
 - b. Seek only the good of him against whom the anger is directed?

Do we have anyone for whom we cannot give thanks?

Angry with his brother. To ask "Who is my brother?" is to play the cunning legalist, seeking to evade the force of Jesus' strong words. It is the same as asking "And who is my neighbor?" (Lk. 10:29), for who would dare frame such a question if his heart were full of love for any of God's creatures? (Cf. Mt. 5:43-47) Who could prove that Jesus uses it to mean only the "son of your father," or "anyone of your same religious society"? Like it or not, we are all sons of Noah and that makes us brothers.

Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca . . . Raca is an Aramaic word of contempt or scorn. Fool usually receives two interpretations, either of which could probably be right:

1. According to the Greek idea (*môre*), it means "you empty-headed so-and-so," and is a criticism of one's intellectual capacity or alertness.
2. According to a similarly-pronounced Hebrew word (*môreb*), it judges his moral character: "you damned rebel."

Both attitudes are condemned as arising out of ungoverned anger. Note that a merely superficial avoidance of the word "fool" is not the command, since both Jesus (Lk. 11:40; 12:20; 24:25), Paul (I Cor. 15:36; Gal. 3:1) and James (Jas. 2:20) all use words which connote "fool or foolish one." Rather, He proscribes the derogatory contempt that is usually implied in those terms. The principle is the same in evil speech as in murder: the evil heart is the source (Mt. 15:18, 19), and if an evil heart comes up with other words than "raca" or "fool," that despising, slanderous reproach felt in the heart is just as severely condemned by the Lord!

See with what emphatic language the sages warned against an unruly tongue and perverse speech, and how they praised kind and helpful words: Prov. 4:23, 24; 6:12; 10:11-14, 18-21, 31, 32; 11:9; 12, 13; 12:18; 13:3; 14:17, 29; 15:1, 2, 4, 18, 28; 16:32; 17:9; 20, 27, 28; 18:13; 19:11; 20:3; 21:23; 22:24, 25; 25:8; 19:20, 22.

Jesus tests not merely the consistency of our outward conduct with some laws, but the very nature of our HEART! Our heart motives must be beyond the censure of God. Jesus gives us fair warning: "You will be judged on MOTIVES, not merely upon your deeds. What is in your heart will overflow in your actions. What

your heart dictates, you really are. Your very motives must be so pure and right that right deeds follow." (See 7:16-20) Jesus desires to alter the main-spring of our actions. This standard of judgment is so rigid that we must not be all surprised to hear Jesus say to the best of the best men: "You must be born again!"

Finally, Jesus is not expounding the meaning of the Sixth Commandment, saying that it is also broken by anger, spite, hate and contempt. Rather, His new revelation that covers this basic area of human relationships is intended to fulfill and go entirely beyond the Sixth Commandment with more stringent judgments than that good commandment could require. Before, one only suffered for murdering; now, one goes to hell just for hate! (Jn. 3:15; Rev. 21:8)

II. HASTEN TO HEAL A HURT WHICH HINDERS HOLINESS AND HARMONY

5:23 **If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar.**

Jesus uses language of that dispensation then in force, but His principle applies to all forms of true, outward worship however it might be offered to God, whether in prayers, offerings, the Lord's Supper, hymn singing or whatever. *Thy gift* is not specific here, since no Jew was to appear before God with empty hands (Dt. 16:16, 17). But the awe inspiring ceremony of presenting an unblemished animal to a holy God was calculated to remind the sinner of his unholiness. This unholiness is most practically felt in the treatment of one's fellows. The personal tension of the worshipper at the moment of his sacrifice could easily call to mind those disharmonies and struggles in his life that made such sacrificing necessary. Perhaps while laying his hands upon the head of the animal (Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13), he might be praying a prayer of confession of sins, similar to the confession made by the high priests (Lev. 16:21), and in this solemn moment the worshipper recalls that his *brother has something against him.*

Aught against thee: mark that wording! There is no room here for self-justifications, rationalizations or excuses. Many suppose that Jesus' exhortation is addressed to the "offender" as if he were truly guilty, but the question of rightness or wrongness in this grievance does not enter the question. Jesus deliberately avoided the decision as to who was right in the grievance or whose fault it was. He knew that men do not seek reconciliation and forgive each

other because of pride. Pride is selfishness, exhibited in the self-justifications: "He started it! I'm in the right and no apologies are necessary on my part!" But this disposition to claim one's right to himself is the essence of all sin. So the Lord says, "You might as well not sacrifice so long as that disposition rules you. You both might have been wrong and you on your part need to forgive him! If you have not forgiven him, how can you expect God to forgive you? What good would another sacrifice do?" Personal repentance may often have to precede a willingness to forgive the brother. It is even impossible to pray well unless one has shown a readiness to forgive and seek reconciliation with an offended brother. (Cf. Mk. 11:25, 26) If events should prove that the "offended brother" had no objective case against the "offender," in which case worship was yet hindered until a settlement of the matter was reached, how much more is worship vitiated and reprehensible if the "offender" wronged him willfully and had not yet righted the situation!

THIS IS THE MOST VITAL PRINCIPLE OF TRUE RELIGION: worship is not acceptable to God from any worshipper who harbors basic disobedience to any of God's commands in his heart! (I Sam. 15:22; Psa. 40:6-8; 66:18; 51:16, 17; Prov. 15:8; 21:27; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:5, 6; 66:1-4; Jer. 6:16-20; 7:9, 10; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8; Mk. 12:33; Rom. 15:5, 6; I Jn. 2:9; 3:17; 4:20) Reconciliation, as a supreme duty, becomes more important than all acts of worship, since continuing grudges, envy, malice and secret hatreds break that all-important relationship with God. Only the "pure in heart" can truly worship God.

But how often the status quo is allowed to remain as days become years without one step being taken to reconcile brothers at odds with one another! (Cf. I Cor. 3:1-4; 6:1-8; Jas. 3:9, 10; Mt. 18:7-14; Lk. 17:1-4) How can two elders, for instance, pray together at the Lord's table when they refuse to speak to each other any other time? How can worship continue uninterrupted when two congregations of the church of Christ mutually excommunicate each other over nothing more serious than "the scripturalness of one loaf on the Lord's table"? How can a lady worship her God, if she knows that another's pride has been wounded and jealousy aroused by her receiving an honor rightly belonging to the other? How can brethren who use musical instruments in their praise of God hope to please Him if they have not sought diligently to be reconciled to their brethren who hold this very practice against them?

5:24 **Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way.** The priest would certainly understand your necessity and sympathetically see to it that your animal is taken care of until your return. (Heb. 5:1-4) **First be reconciled to your brother** at whatever cost to your pride or interests; make it right with him! Barnes (54) helpfully suggests:

If you have wronged him, make restitution.

If you owe him a debt which ought to have been paid, pay it.

If you have injured his character, confess it and seek pardon.

Do not lightly dismiss a small burst of temper which hurt him, even though you might have afterwards regretted it. If the matter has not yet been healed, go to him, acknowledge your regret for having acted in so unbrotherly a manner.

If he is under an erroneous impression, if your conduct has been such as to lead him to suspect that you have injured him, make an explanation.

Do all *in your power*, and all that you *ought to do*, to have the matter settled. Jesus explains the proper procedure later (Mt. 18:15-18).

Then, having done all possible to be reconciled, do not hold the matter as a further hindrance to your worship, even if he refuses to be conciliated. **Then come and offer thy gift.** Mere fraternal peace does not produce automatic acceptance with God: His orders must be obeyed, His sacrifices offered. Performance of our duty toward our fellows does not release us from responsibility to please Him according to His wishes. Merely living according to a high morality by always doing what is in the best interest of our neighbor can never excuse one for not being baptized or refusing some other obedience.

III. HURRY TO HALT THE HAZARD OF A HORRIBLE HUMILIATION

5:25 **Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him.** This is always sound advice: it is always best to settle out of court. The brief allusion of Jesus here to a threatening lawsuit that ends disastrously for one party has been quite variously interpreted:

1. *Allegorically.* Some see God as the adversary; others, the devil or Jesus. Some regard God as the judge, while Jesus becomes the adversary. The prison becomes hell from which final restoration can, in the view of some, or cannot, in the view of others, be realized after the inexorable rigors of divine justice against the hardened and impenitent sinner have been sufficiently satisfied. ("Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou have paid . . .")

Some see a relation intended by Jesus between God's judgment on hatred harbored in the heart (v. 22), the suggestion that God judges sacrifices unsatisfactory until reconciliation is made (v. 24), and the judge from whose final judgment there is no escaping (v. 25, 26). But in the absence of a clear statement from Jesus, who could prove that this is His meaning?

But is it really necessary to interpret this illustration allegorically? Jesus gives no clue that He thus intends it to be understood. While Luke (12:57-59) records this same story in another connection which might have overtones of God's final judgment, yet this is no necessary indication that Jesus so intended the story in this context, nor that He could not use a well-turned illustration to suggest various conclusions as their need and situation demand.

2. *Literally,* Jesus is giving a piece of sound, practical advice by coming down to a lower level or argument: "If your proud, obstinate hearts block your seeking reconciliation with an offended brother, because you are unmoved by the higher motives of loving concern for your adversary enough to settle with him by peaceful means, then I will talk a language you can understand. Do not let your pride blind you to the possibility that he could take you to court over your differences nor to the ever-present chance that you might lose your case in court! So, if you refuse to seek reconciliation with your adversary until the matter goes to the judge, you have foolishly squandered your precious freedom and lost your brother too! The business of a judge is meting out perfect justice and you will get what is coming to you. You will have time in your jail cell to regret what could have been avoided by your humbly seeking a peaceful solution with your offended brother before he became your accuser-at-law!"

Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou have paid the last farthing. Debtor's prisons were not uncommon. (Cf. Mt. 18:23-25) Also the Law awarded damages to be paid to the wronged party in any question (Ex. 21:18—22:15). If payment of such debts or damages were not forthcoming, the court could hold a man in prison until full payment be made. How this payment would be made while in prison is not mentioned here, since the point of Jesus' story is simply that there is no time to be lost: it is always best to settle quarrels out of court. Elsewhere Jesus tells how some debts were resolved. (Mt. 18:24, 25, 34) Consider Solomon's similar advice: Prov. 6:1-5.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What basic truths underlie the OT prohibition of killing?
2. Did the OT command "Thou shalt not kill," prohibit the death penalty?
3. Did the command prohibit war?
4. Show the relationship between Jesus' prohibition of hate and His commanding perfect love (5:43-48)
5. Define "hate" showing its relation to "love."
6. Define "anger" showing its relation to "hate."
7. List several Biblical passages which demonstrate the wrath of God, the anger of Jesus, and the proper anger of the wise and godly man.
8. Did Jesus say, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without cause"? Prove your answer.
9. To whom was it said, "Thou shalt not kill"? Who said it? When?
10. What is the meaning of "Gehenna"? What is the history behind the word? What does it mean as used throughout the NT?
11. What is the general import of the words: "raca," "môreh or fool"?
12. Describe the Jewish service at which the individual worshipper brings his gift for offering.
13. Express in your own words the vital principle of true religion that is implied in Jesus' instructions about reconciliation with an offended brother.
14. What is the exact wording of Jesus' statement of the nature of the dissension between two people? What is the psychological bearing of the wording upon the person addressed by Jesus?

15. What acts of practical righteousness must precede acceptable worship?
16. What does Jesus mean by mentioning the legal case which ends badly for one of the parties?

C. THE RELATION OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN TO THE LAW

3. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD LUST.

TEXT: 5:27-32

27. Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery:
28. but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.
29. And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell.
30. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell.
31. It was said also, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:
32. But I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is it possible for man to appraise and appreciate the physical and moral beauty of a woman without intent or desire to lust after her?
- b. How do men of our generation rebel against Jesus' judgments and make lust easier for others?
- c. How does Jesus intend His striking imperatives, concerning tearing out the right eye and cutting off the right hand, to be understood and applied? How did the apostles teach and apply the same lesson?
- d. How could divorcing one's wife, unless she has been unfaithful, "make her an adulteress"? (v. 32)

- e. How does Jesus intend this whole teaching on the subject of adultery and divorce to be applied: as the law of the State? as the law of the Church? or merely as a principal of individual conduct?
- f. How does Jesus intend the "exception for unfaithfulness" to be understood and applied? Is Jesus tacitly urging divorce upon one whose partner has proven unfaithful? Does adultery automatically break the marriage tie?
- g. Since the usual punishment under the Mosaic law against adultery was the death of the adulterers, would a divorce be necessary after that sentence was carried out? What, if anything, does this fact suggest about the state of morality in that age to which Jesus addressed His dictum on divorce?
- h. Is Jesus revoking (or setting aside) the Law on the question of what constitutes adultery when He condemns the sin of the heart?
- i. How does purity of heart strengthen the home and human society?
- j. In what way is divorce contrary to God's plan for man?
- k. What constitutes sincere repentance of the sin of adultery:
 (1) in the case of an undivorced, unfaithful married person?
 (2) in the case of a wrongly divorced person who has remarried?
 (that is, one who has remarried while his former mate is still living)
- l. Is adultery, committed under any condition, the "unforgiveable sin"?
- m. Does Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce, adultery and remarriage cover every possible human case? If so, how? If not, what are His disciples to do when they find a case not exactly dealt with in the NT? Are they to make rules where the Lord made none? How are they to apply the rules He did give? If you think that Jesus' teaching does not cover every possible case, why, accordingly, did not Jesus intend to deal with every imaginable possibility?
- n. If the marriage bond is broken (in the sight of God) by a divorce on the basis of unchastity, are the two individuals yet married in any sense? If they are no longer married in any sense, are they eligible as such to marry?
- o. How does the rejection of unchanging standards erode morality, even if it does not openly encourage immorality?
- p. How can one keep himself unspotted from the world (cf. Jas. 1:27), when there is so much that tempts all about him?
- q. Why must Christians vigorously oppose immorality in all forms?

PARAPHRASE

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman with a desire for her has already committed adultery with her in his imagination.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you! It is better that you lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go to hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better that you lose one member of your body than that your whole body go to hell.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a proper certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every man who divorces his wife, except on the ground of her unchastity, is making her to commit adultery. Whoever marries a woman thus divorced also commits adultery."

SUMMARY

Not merely the external act of adultery is condemned before God, but also the more far-reaching lust that smolders beneath an outward decency. Even the most precious and justifiable and useful habit, association or pleasure that carries with it a seduction threatening one's purity of heart, must be mercilessly excised from one's life. Unchastity is the only valid reason for divorce; any other excuse opens doors for adultery.

NOTES

I. A SEARCHING AND SOBER SEX STANDARD

5:27 **Ye have heard that it was said.** Even though the phrase "to them of old time" does not appear, yet it may easily be added, inasmuch as the law against adultery was certainly known before the Mosaic Law (Cf. Gen. 39:9), and was merely codified by it as a moral principle against any act that destroys the sanctity of the marriage and family. The Law against adultery (Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18) only intended "voluntary sexual intercourse by a married man with another than his wife, or by a married woman with another than her husband," while the commandment against *covering* (Ex. 20:17) actually mentions a longing desire for "thy neighbor's wife." If Jesus were merely correcting false or inadequate interpretations of the Law, He could have simply cited the ignored tenth commandment. Yet the Law could punish only the act (Lev. 18:20; 20:10-20), being

impotent to touch the sinful desire. However, the death penalty required for the punishment of adultery should cause one to reflect upon the terrible nature of this sin.

5:28 But I say unto you. What Jesus is about to declare is a hard-won personal decision, not only the most searching judgment of God. Jesus had faced this question of personal desires under another form and conquered (4:3, 4). **Whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her:** this is not a look of evaluation, admiration or affection, but of lusty desire. Both Job (24:15; 31:1-4, 9-11) and Solomon (Prov. 2:9, 16-19; 5; 6:23—7:27; 23:26-28) saw the connection between the lust of the heart and eyes and the act of adultery. But only Jesus could declare and enforce a judgment unknown in the Mosaic Law: **he has committed adultery with her already in his heart.** By forbidding the lusting look, Jesus prevents the adulterous act. Here is the true cause of adultery: sexual desire that smolders beneath an outward decency, impure thoughts and lewd imaginations represent a subtle rebellion against God's design for the purity of human love. Jesus attacks licentiousness and lust in the heart, because they represent the true, corrupt character of the man even though they have not yet come forth as actual deeds. Though such thoughts are safely hidden from human censure, they are glaringly obvious to the eye of God! *Already in his heart:* Jesus' point is that the impure heart has already decided upon a course of action which the body would execute upon the first combination of favorable circumstances. Peter (II Pet. 2:14a) describes this kind of person as "having eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin." Paul puts it (Tit. 1:15): "To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted." He who *looks to lust* is using just one means to stimulate his corrupt emotions, since pictures, books and filthy conversation arouse and feed lust just as much as the actual presence of the woman. The brazenly assured half-truth that nobody can be punished simply for desiring a woman with his eyes is severely condemned. What a man thinks he *is*, and, on that basis, Jesus judges him!

Jesus has already provided the effective antidote for this temptation: "Blessed are the **PURE IN HEART . . .**" (See notes on 5:8) He would have us be completely sincere, so single of purpose, so unadulterated that we have no conflicting desires. We have no

business harboring an emotion the conclusion of which we see to be sin! If we actually love every woman with that intelligent desire to do what is always in her best interest, how can we corrupt our heart with desires to sin against her?

II. A SEVERE, SWIFT SURGERY OF THE SUGGESTIVE AND SINISTER

5:29, 30 **And if thy right eye or thy right hand causeth thee to stumble.** Jesus' word is to be taken figuratively but seriously. If He be interpreted merely in a literal sense, sheer irrelevancy results. Jesus rejected a purely literal construction of phrase like this when He refused even to make His disciples wash their hands merely to remove ceremonial defilement (Mt. 15:20). Since a wicked heart produces sin, the purification must take place there. (Study Mt. 15:1-20 and Mk. 7:1-23 to appreciate this concept.) Anything as seemingly defensible, precious or useful to us as these parts of our body had better be surrendered than permit them to destroy our soul! Many good things can so often be the enemy of the best: for example, any habit which could be a seduction, any possession that could become an obsession, any association or any pleasure that could be the cause of sin is a mortal enemy of our soul. **Pluck it out . . . cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish . . .** How did the apostles understand and preach this "impossible" demand of Jesus? Paul (Col. 2:10—3:9) teaches that mere austerity is of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh, even though it seems to promote rigor of devotion, self-abasement and severity to the body. The reason offered is that not merely one portion of the body is to be made to suffer, but rather the whole man must be crucified and buried! (Mt. 16:24-26; Ro. 6:3; 12:1; I Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:24; I Pet. 2:11) Only perfect self-denial can overcome the powerful insistence of a lusty imagination. No cost must be thought too high to pay to avoid the gratification of wicked passions. No restraint is too drastic nor self-discipline too severe to avoid using the body for sinful purposes. Better maimed than damned! But so to act is to expose oneself to the solicitous cries of well-meaning neighbors and to be thought a fool for so harshly limiting oneself.

Some assume that Jesus is responding here to an objector whose demurring from His harsh judgment (5:28) might be stated, "But, Jesus, where can you draw the line between looking at a woman to

appreciate her physical beauty and the place where that admiration becomes lust?" If Jesus is responding to such a question, then His answer may be paraphrased thus: "If your looking at a woman or touching her causes adulterous thoughts to rise in your heart, do not look at her! Take your hands off her!" How intensely practical this word of Jesus! He knew how irresistible is that sexual tension when excited and tantalized by a look or a caress.

What can break the spell of this sensual enravishment and bring reality back into focus? Nothing less than the live possibility that **thy whole body be cast into hell!** Hell awaits the offender: what an incentive to immediate and uncompromising obedience! How this reality restores one's perspective! Later, Jesus also emphasizes the entrance into life, to stimulate a positive refusal to indulge one's desires. (Mt. 18:8, 9; cf. Ro. 8:13) Fear is a proper motive. (Cf. Ac. 24:25; Ro. 1:18; 11:20, 22; II Cor. 5:11; Gal. 6:7, 8; Heb. 10:26-31) When tempted to shrink from the self-discipline demanded by the Lord, think of the alternative!

What are some applications of Jesus' judgments against immorality?

1. Young people who are not married are forbidden to act as if they were! Lovers may not make their own rules, but must obey Jesus.
2. The Biblical view of purity contradicts the readily-accepted axiom of modern advertising: "Sex sells." (Eph. 5:3-12) Though successful in selling, it has also succeeded in relaxing a proper sense of modesty and purity.
3. Dressing to arouse sexual appetite is forbidden. (Mt. 18:7-9; Ro. 14:13—15:3a)
4. Those of seemingly irreproachable moral integrity who think nothing of seeking their erotic entertainment in socially-approved ways also should feel the Lord's censure. Some socially acceptable means are risque comedy, licentious books, "adults only" movies. One must examine his motives for participation in such things: does he do it with an eye to criticize by God's standards, or to satisfy an idle curiosity, or to indulge a secret sensuality?
5. "Sophisticated sex," the view that the pleasures of sex are perfectly harmless, inconsequential and may be freely enjoyed outside marriage without any sense of sin or shame, is a

false view of man. That sophistication which glorifies illicit relations associated with the "new morality" or "free love" is not harmless and morally unobjectionable, but is contemptible, damnable and worthy of the most vigorous opposition. While it may not be absolutely possible to prove such relations to be wrong by philosophical reasoning, the objective standard which damns this way of thinking stands upon the authoritative word of Jesus.

Can you think of other applications? Let us beware not to be hypocritical as we seek to apply Jesus' word, as if we ourselves were not affected by those overpowering forces of our age which would portray so many forms of sexual perversion as exciting and entertaining. (I Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:1b)

What can save us from the all-pervasive sexuality of this era?

1. Thorough knowledge of God's Word regarding this problem, with a view to answering temptations that certainly will arise. (I Cor. 6:9-20; 10:1-13; 5; 7; I Th. 4:3-8; Heb. 13:4) This constant reflection upon what God has provided to lead us into life and godliness as well as upon the attractions of His precious and very great promises, will show the way of escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion (II Pet. 1:3, 4). This habitual choice of truth and righteousness re-enforces the conscience, making the right decision easier when the temptations present themselves. (Phil. 4:8) Monasticism, or refusing to look upon a woman at any time, is no way to overcome the adulterous look, since refusal to think about a forbidden desire is the best way to find the mind most securely fixed upon it. Only positive thought which fills the mind with the view-point of God can cast out adulterous sentiments.
2. The expulsive power of a new affection leaves no room for the "lust of the eyes" (I Jn. 2:15, 16) which contradicts that new love. The intelligent choice to love one of the opposite sex, even as God has loved them, destroys the power of lust. This is true moral vision: the ability to see a man or woman, not as the means of satisfying one's lust, but as one whom we may love to the point of sacrificing one's self for their highest good.

3. The purifying power of hope. (Cf. I Jn. 3:3) No sane man will risk his eternal security by momentarily dallying with a temptation when he knows that his salvation depends upon unwavering faithfulness.
4. Positive action helps to break the spell of some allurements. Sometimes flight is best. (Gen. 39; II Tim. 2:22) Plunging into the service of others does not allow time for that idleness in which the self-indulgent imagination may seek satisfaction.

III. A SUBTLE AND SERIOUS SUBVERSION OF SOCIETY

5:31 **Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.** (See also 19:1-9) In these few words Jesus practically cites all of the Mosaic legislation on the subject. (Dt. 24:1-4; 22:13-21) Observe that the only divine law that ever spoke on the subject of divorce did not command it. Divorce was merely tolerated as representing men's yet unconverted hearts (19:8) and was regulated to prevent grosser inhumanities.

The reason Jesus connects His teaching about divorce with His instruction about adultery is that there is an unavoidable moral connection. When any society sinks to such a level that complete freedom of divorce for any excuse permits as many husbands or wives in quick succession as desire may crave, any command not to commit adultery becomes a farce.

God hates divorce (Mal. 2:13-16), because one thus deals treacherously with his companion, the wife of his youth; because one breaks the covenant he made with her before God; and because he thus shows his basic inhumanity by casting her out and compelling her to sob out her troubles alone at God's altar. This heartbreak, loneliness, shame and often destitution caused by "easy divorces" caused God to reject the worship of the Jews (Mal. 2:13b). Compare notes on 5:23. God also hates divorce because it goes against the nature both of the institution of marriage and of man himself (Mt. 19:1-9).

5:32 **But I say unto you.** For the full Christian teaching, compare 19:1-9; Mk. 10:11, 12; Lk. 16:18; Ro. 7:1-3; I Cor. 7:10-17. Were Jesus merely clearing the rubbish of human traditions from the ancient Law against adultery, as many assume, in order to show its deep and true spiritual meaning and restore the Seventh Commandment to its proper observance, then why does not Jesus restore also the

death penalty for unchastity, rather than suggest that a woman divorced for any cause is made to be (or made to appear to be) an adulteress when she marries another? The OT Law against adultery was clear in its definition of the death penalty to the adulterers. (Cf. Dt. 22:22; Lv. 20:10) But He is not defending the Law, as misinterpreted by the scribes and Pharisees. Rather, He is picturing true righteousness which is always a greater standard than legal righteousness. Jesus here completely removes the necessity for the Law, by establishing a principle that thoroughly fulfills the intent of the Law.

The Law seemed to permit divorce "or any cause." (Mt. 19:3) The rabbis could not agree upon the exact intent of the phrase: "if the wife does not find favor in his eyes, because he has found in her something shameful." (Cf. Dt. 24:1) Hillel's school interpreted it in the widest and most lax manner possible: literally for any cause. Shammai adhered more strictly to the spirit of the law, his interpretation being "wantonness, lasciviousness, lewdness" as the shameful things that the husband must find in his wife before he may divorce her, although he did not include actual adultery since that was punished by death. A rabbi Akiba even allowed the finding a more desirable woman as ample justification for divorcing the present wife. Such a lowering of the moral standards of marriage probably affected the question of unfaithfulness to the point that even adultery became so commonplace that it was regarded as an inconvenient and embarrassing social "mistake," rather than high treason against the family. As a result, the ancient Law seemingly was not carried out, as many commentators suggest. (Cf. Hosea 4:14; Jn. 4:18; Lk. 7:36-50; Mt. 21:32) However, to assert that the Jews did not have the right to execute the death penalty proves nothing, since they exercised the penalty when their conscience was sufficiently aroused. (Cf. Jn. 18:31 with Ac. 7:58, 59; 26:10; note Jn. 7:1, 19, 25; 8:59; 10:31-33) The story of the adulteress brought to Jesus (Jn. 7:53—8:11) is inadmissible as evidence because of the adequate manuscript testimony against it. (See Butler, *John*, Vol. II, p. 42)

Every one that putteth away his wife . . . maketh her an adulteress. Here the principle is stated regarding only the man, but it is reversible (Mk. 10:12). Because Jesus made only one exception to the general rule, His rule may be stated as above: "Anyone who divorces his wife for any other excuse makes her an adulteress." But questions immediately arise: how or in what sense does he make her an adulteress? Is she really considered by God to

be an adulteress or is she only falsely stigmatized as such by those who know of her divorce? The phrase, translated by the ASV "maketh her an adulteress," (*poiei autên moicheutbênai*) is made difficult by the fact that the last word is a passive infinitive in form. The question for the translators is whether the infinitive must be translated passively or whether it is the usual Greek translation for an active Hebrew verb. The difference in meaning which results from the varying translation may be expressed as follows:

1. *Actively*: "(he causes her) to commit adultery or to be an adulteress." Because a woman, divorced for just any excuse, is not really divorced in God's view, her practical necessity to remarry in order to be supported would force her to commit adultery, since she was really ineligible to remarry. Is this practical necessity her personal responsibility?
2. *Passively*: "(he causes her) to be adulterated" or defiled by her sexual contact with another, when she was not really (in God's sight) divorced from her husband, even though this other be recognized by the society to be her new husband. The Law (Dt. 24:4) speaks of this second union as "defilement." Another possible passive translation is offered by *Lenski*: "(he causes her) to be stigmatized as an adulteress" when in fact she is not, her divorce being on quite other grounds. The mere fact that she was divorced might give rise to suspicion of adultery, even though the public reason was some triviality. Thus, she would bear the suspicion or stigma of having been an adulteress.

Thus it will be seen that neither construction necessarily views the woman as guilty. Both view her as the unfortunate victim of a vicious system which subjects her to the caprice of her husband. What is unequivocally clear is that the stigma of adultery is related to her remarriage.

In regard to the man **who shall marry her when she is put away**, the same translational difficulty exists due to another middle-passive Greek verb (*moichatai*), which carries with it the same difficulties of interpretation. Is he really an adulterer or only stigmatized as such? Yet, the fact that Matthew (19:9 twice) and Mark (10:11, 12 twice) seem to use the verb with active force, while Luke's parallel (16:18) uses an undoubted active verb (*moicheuei*), points to the conclusion that the man who marries an

improperly divorced woman commits adultery and is personally guilty of sexual relations with a woman who, as God views the question, was the wife of another. Legal permission granted by a State for any cause other than unfaithfulness does not justify taking advantage of such permission.

Let us compare the various elements in Jesus' teaching:

<i>Mt. 5:32</i>	<i>Mt. 19:9</i>	<i>Mk. 10:11, 12</i>
but I say unto you that	And I say unto you,	And he saith unto them,
(1) every one that putteth away his wife	(1) Whosoever shall put away his wife,	(1) Whosoever shall put away his wife,
(2) saving for the cause of fornication,	(2) except for fornication,	(2)
(3) maketh her an adulteress	(3)	(3)
(4)	(4) and shall marry another, committeth adultery:	(4) and marry another, committeth adultery against her:
(5) and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.	(5) and he that marieth her when she is put away committeth adultery.	(5)
(6)	(6)	(6) and if she herself put away her husband and marry another, she committeth adultery.

Luke 16:18 merely repeats elements 1, 4, 5.

Obviously, the man who thus divorces his wife for relatively trivial reasons does so with a view of remarriage. According to element 4, he sins against his former wife, in that he was not really (in God's sight) divorced from her and he sins against his new wife, since he was not eligible to marry her. Thus, he involves four people in adultery by his selfish divorce: his former wife, himself, his new wife, and his former wife's new husband.

The one exception to the general rules described above is clearly stated twice by Jesus (5:32; 19:9): "except for the cause of fornication."

tion." "Fornication" (*porneia*) is a general word used to mean any kind of unlawful sexual relations, whether prostitution, unchastity, whoredom or premarital intercourse. The Law (Dt. 22:20, 21) assumed the possible case of premarital infidelity, but death, not divorce, resolved the question, as in the case of marital infidelity (Dt. 22:22). But Jesus unequivocally teaches that a person may divorce his mate because of their unfaithfulness. This, and only this, divorce is valid before God: such a couple is no longer married in any sense.

But is this exception offered as a recommendation that those whose mate betrays them SHOULD divorce them, or is it offered as a concession under intolerable conditions, so that those whose mate betrays them MAY divorce them? Since pardon and complete reconciliation are not inconceivable, Jesus' exception is a concession. Although a partner who seeks sexual satisfaction outside his marriage has certainly sinned, his mate is not automatically exonerated for his conduct or attitudes that may have driven his formerly faithful mate to seek illicit satisfactions. In other words, is divorce, even for the cause of marital unfaithfulness, the best answer to the unfaithful consort's problem? The cause of the unfaithfulness may partially be found in the so-called "innocent party," although, of course, not necessarily. The sin of adultery does break the marriage vow of the adulterer, but not of the other partner; hence, the marriage union is not yet severed. The union may only be ended by death or divorce, neither of which has yet occurred. The injured mate has the right but not the obligation to terminate the marriage in divorce. If he is satisfied with the genuineness of the adulterous partner's repentance, the marriage may be continued. Forgiveness is not unlikely nor impossible.

Because of the heavy emphasis that Jesus gives to the idea that the remarriage of improperly divorced mates to others causes adultery, we are stimulated to ask, "What of the person whose divorce from his mate is recognized by God as valid? May he remarry?" For this question the Lord has left no answer. If we may be permitted to solve the problem by human reasoning, we would conclude: the couple in question are really divorced, hence, married in no sense and, therefore, eligible to marry. This conclusion is valid as much for the "guilty" as for the "innocent," since there can be no sense in which one party is married while the other is not. Yet, this is a human conclusion: Jesus did not say so.

Jesus is revealing ideals which will render adultery and divorce impossible: remove lust from the heart and adultery becomes impossible; when adultery is eliminated, divorce becomes unnecessary. The Law did not nor could not take adequate account of the sin in the heart. Therefore it had to legislate against certain external acts in order to eliminate worse. The language of Jesus is as far from legal terminology as could be imagined especially in dealing with all sides of every case. This feature renders difficult a legalistic application of Jesus' teaching, since He chose not to say more. Many questions are left to human wisdom:

1. What constitutes repentance in regard to the sin of adultery?
 - a. Divorcing one's wife who was not really divorced from her first husband? What about children of her second marriage?
 - b. Divorcing one's second wife, because not really divorced from the first? Must one return to the first wife?
 - c. Must the first wife divorce her second husband in order to return to her first? Would God approve of such a return, when He once called it an abomination? (Dt. 24:4)
 - d. Must unlawful (from God's viewpoint) marriages be broken up as evidence of repentance?
 - e. Or, does repentance consist of refusing to commit further adultery (or refusal to divorce one's present mate) without changing the past mistakes?
2. Since God has revealed no specific means whereby repentance of adultery may be demonstrated, is the confession of this sin to God enough to assure one's conscience that God has forgiven the sin? Then, if God has truly forgiven the sin, how does He then regard the formerly illegitimate marriage? The marriage, presumably legal in the eyes of society, has continued perhaps for years until the individual was led to repentance. Does I Cor. 7:24 apply?
3. If an act of adultery causes divorce and the adulterer was later forgiven by God, would God permit him (or her) to remarry after that? Would one be truly penitent if he sought another mate?

The very complexity of such questions and the uncomplicated nature of the Lord's revelation by which we are to decide these problems, should help us to see in what spirit He intends that we shall take His Word on the subject. He has revealed enough to keep us out of these entanglements; so little to get us out. And though His silence be regarded by the legalist as an inadequacy, yet the fact that Jesus did not go into great detail is most significant. In this problem, as in all other moral issues, He laid down broad guidelines within which His disciple must make his own moral judgments. He has not fettered His followers with multitudinous rules, details and cases. Instead, He provides in us the new nature that abhors all that is connected with adultery and divorce. Should we find ourselves involved in such a situation, however, we are left free to decide, in harmony with all His other principles, how best to arrive at the most equitable, most merciful solution for our given case. Thus, without detailed laws, He controls us by His Spirit which He puts in us.

Let it be closely observed that these controls will work only in him to whom Jesus addressed these words, that is, the disciple. They cannot be applied to society in general without the loss of that controlling, motivating moral vigor found only in faithful discipleship to Jesus.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where is the OT Law on divorce located? (give book, chapter, verse)
2. What was the common application of this law, as interpreted by the Jews?
3. What significant difference does Jesus' instruction make in that law?
4. What is "fornication"? How does Jesus use that word in this context?
5. What is the difference between "adultery" and "fornication" usually noted in other contexts?
6. What was the OT penalty meted out against those guilty of adultery? Solve the discrepancy between this law and the situation to which Jesus aimed His judgment.
7. What are the great, abiding principles which underly all that Jesus teaches concerning marriage, the family, divorce, and adultery?
8. List the other NT passages which give teaching or helpful information on the questions of marriage, divorce and adultery.

9. Explain how a man, who divorces his otherwise faithful wife, is condemned by Jesus, since "he maketh her an adulteress" (v. 32). Is she really an adulteress, or merely and falsely stigmatized as such? Or both? Explain your answer. Does she become an adulteress by having to marry again in order to sustain her life?
10. On the basis of your answer to the previous question, explain how a man who marries the divorcee "committeth adultery." (v. 32) Is he falsely stigmatized as an adulterer because he married a woman thought to be an adulteress (when in fact she was not), or, is he really an adulterer because he married a woman ineligible for marriage (since, in fact, her "divorce for any cause" from her former husband was no divorce at all)?
11. What breaks the marriage bond?

C. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO THE LAW

4. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD TRUTH.

TEXT: 5:33-37

33. Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:
34. but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God;
35. nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.
36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black.
37. But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil *one*.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why should one avoid the use of oaths as much as possible?
- b. What are some modern means of evading the responsibility for being truthful?
- c. How may we oppose the use of oaths which obviously profane the name of the Lord? What are some effective ways to react to

another's profane swearing, in such a way as to register the solemnity in which we hold an oath, the majesty in which we revere God, the sacredness with which we regard every word, as well as our suspicion of all who feel that their feeble word cannot stand alone without the deception of a false oath? How may we do this so as to be truly helpful to him who swears habitually, casually, and thus, profanely? (Cf. Col. 4:6) Self-righteous indignation will only close his mind.

- d. Why is it particularly important that Jesus' disciple be careful about what he says?
- e. How does lack of sincerity profane God's name when invoked in an insincere oath?
- f. How does insincerity in swearing affect one's relations with others?
- g. How far should Jesus' prohibition ("Swear not at all") be taken? Is it an absolute prohibition of all oaths, swearing, pledges, vows, etc.? Or is it relative, referring only to frivolous and hypocritical ones? Or both?
- h. How does the example of Paul and Jesus help us to understand whether we are permitted to swear?
- i. Is the taking of a solemn oath to assume a public office hereby forbidden?
- j. What is the relation of the teaching of Jesus to the Mosaic Law, as to how that relationship reveals itself in this context? Is Jesus abrogating the Mosaic permission to swear? Is He revealing a higher standard?

PARAPHRASE

"Another thing you have heard that was said to the ancients was, 'You must not perjure yourself by swearing falsely, but you must hand over to the Lord what you have promised with an oath.' However, I tell you, do not use an oath at all. Do not back up your word by saying, 'By heaven . . .', for that is God's throne, or by saying, 'By the earth . . .', for that is His footstool, nor 'By Jerusalem . . .', for Jerusalem is the city of God, the Great King. Do not even swear by your own head, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black (to demonstrate the truth of your affirmations)! Let your word be a plain 'Yes' or 'No.' Anything beyond this proceeds from an evil desire to deceive."

SUMMARY

The Law of Moses required that men abide by that to which they bind themselves by their oath. Jesus counsels against all oaths as basically unnecessary when a simple affirmation is sufficient, as basically evil, when the desire is to deceive.

NOTES

I. THE SUBTLE SACRILEGE OF SPECIOUS SWEARING

5:33 **Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time:** Apparently, Jesus uses this formula to indicate that what He is about to say is not an exact quotation of any one law, but rather a correct summation of several laws. **Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.** The basic principle to which Jesus refers in this summary of the Mosaic legislation is the use of God's name to guarantee the inviolability of some promise made to Him, or to attest the truth of one's word by appeal to Him to witness. This principle responds to a psychological need of man for such guarantees:

1. The inner truthfulness of the speaker cannot be verified on other grounds (except by his generally-known character).
2. The assumption that no one would have the temerity to back a false statement by so solemn an appeal to the Deity as an oath.
3. The prevalence of falsehood in common speech creates suspicion concerning all words not thus guaranteed by an oath.

The Mosaic Law, in governing the use of oaths, regulated them *negatively*: Ex. 20:7 prohibited the employment of the name of God for unworthy objects, as in swearing in the ordinary business of life; Lev. 19:12 prohibited swearing by the Name in order to cover fraud, thus profaning God's Name. It also governed oaths by positive regulations: Dt. 6:13 commanded that oaths be made in the Name of God as evidence of loyalty to Jehovah on the same level with fearing and serving Him; Dt. 10:20 commands oaths in His Name as a manifestation of true reverence towards God; Dt. 23:21-23 teaches to pay what is vowed to God, lest the broken oath be considered sin; it is not sin if one does not vow; Num. 30:2 requires any oath to be kept. Therefore, the Jews were permitted to take

oaths in the Name of God, but He could not permit men to use His Name falsely or irreverently without punishment. God considered swearing as a necessary measure until men's false hearts could be converted and satisfied just to tell the truth without backing it up with oaths. In certain cases, the Law even required oaths (Ex. 22:11; Num. 5:19).

For a fuller understanding of the use of oaths in actual practice, the following Scriptures may help: Gen. 14:22-24; 24:2-9, 37; 32:50, 53; 47:29-31; 50:5, 25; Judg. 8:19; 21:5; Ru. 1:17; 3:13; I Sam. 1:26; 17:55; 19:6; 20:3, 17; 25:26; II Sam. 2:27; 3:9, 35; 11:11; 15:21; 19:23; I Kg. 2:23, 24; 18:10; II Kg. 2:2; 6:31; Ezra 10:3-5; Jer. 4:2; 12:16; 29:22, 23; 38:16; 42:5; Am. 8:14. Note that a number of the examples precede the Law. Swearing was used in the commonest affairs of life, some trivial. However, such common swearing arises more from that religious attitude which reveals itself in every facet of life, than from a careless one. Originally, the oath was the truest, most natural expression of a man's conviction of a right awe of God. With the passing of the fervency of the convictions, there arises that contemptible familiarity with sacred things that is seen in frivolous, hypocritical swearing.

We should certainly expect to find NT examples of oaths rightly taken. God swore by Himself (Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13-18; 7:20, 21; Lk. 1:73; Ac. 2:30; Cf. Dt. 32:40). Jesus confessed under oath to being the Christ, God's Son (Mt. 26:63, 64). Paul often called God to witness to the truth of his affirmations (Ro. 1:9; II Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; see also Ac. 18:18). God will send His angel to swear (Rev. 10:5, 6). Thus, whatever Jesus may command in regard to swearing must be interpreted in light of these examples which throw light on how His word was intended.

5:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all. What is Jesus' intention behind this prohibition? To forbid all oaths, judicial and otherwise, or only common, profane swearing?

Jesus is not giving a corrected interpretation of the Law, since, as we have seen, the Law commanded swearing by the Name of God. (Dt. 6:13). His counsel, which requires such common truthfulness, soars so high above the concepts of the Law that even the oaths permitted therein would become unnecessary. Nor is He abrogating the legal permission until He establishes His kingdom of truth in the heart.

Jesus is not MERELY correcting scribal interpretations and evasions, although He does this. To illustrate the compelling need for His infinitely more satisfactory principle of personal integrity, He uses the abuses to which swearing, even ideally, is prone.

Jesus' general purpose, running through this whole discourse on the nature of true righteousness, as opposed to legal righteousness, is to reveal a heart rectitude which is unconditionally and consistently observable in the simplest, outward acts. This injunction ("Swear not at all.") is at least relative to the nature and motive of the oath. A solemn affirmation to convince those who are unable to know one's genuine, inner truthfulness, is permitted. Any oath or confirmatory additions to one's simple word are forbidden if intended to deceive the hearer, or if the user does not feel absolutely pledged to truth and faithfulness by his simple promise! What irony: those that need oaths are forbidden to use them, while those that can best use them do not need them!

Before examining the specific examples of the oaths which are proscribed by Jesus, let us see His wisdom in counselling His followers to steer clear of all oaths. Why should one not swear?

1. Because of what human swearing does to *God*:

- a. It calls upon Him to be witness to, to justify, or to guarantee the truthfulness of relatively unimportant declarations. This borders on presumption.
- b. It often profanes His holy Name to the level that it becomes unworthy of respect, since it calls upon God to witness what is later discovered to be false. Those who call a curse upon themselves if what they say is not true, are daring God to act in a way dictated by their whim.

2. Because of what swearing does to *the one who swears*:

- a. The necessity to guarantee the veracity of some declaration by means of an oath immediately puts in question the truthfulness of all other statements not made under oath.
- b. Swearing tacitly justifies lying when not under oath, since it destroys the sanctity of every word. We must not weaken the obligation for speaking the truth, by rendering our simple affirmation somehow less sacred than our oath.

- c. Because rash or wrong vows must be broken when inconvenient or impossible circumstances render their fulfillment absurd or illegal, they become a useless binding of the conscience. The failure to fulfill the vow or oath becomes a demoralizing kind of perjury. (See Lev. 5:4-6) However, some promises must be broken (cf. Jephthah, Jdg. 11:30-34; Herod, Mt. 14:7), although the ideal is to keep an oath at one's personal damage (Psa. 15:4).
3. Because of what swearing does to *others*: Careless, unnecessary, frequent and hypocritical taking of oaths practically destroys any respect for oaths and proceeds to undermine the highest bonds of faith and truth among men.

Swear not at all is Jesus' criticism of all the perversions of God's permissive legislation, created by the rabbis because they honored certain oaths and ignored other cleverly-worded promises they did not intend to keep. (See Mt. 23:16-22) Their sophistry had developed into the fine art of evasion! The obligation to honor an oath, according to their verdict, depended upon the nature of the object by which one swore: if they swore by something created, it was not necessarily binding and might be simply forgotten for convenience. If the oath was sworn by the dread Name of Jehovah God, the oath was binding. This mode of reasoning probably began simply to avoid pronouncing the Divine Name. Substitutes were put for God's Name which were understood to mean it. But swearing by something other than by God removed also the very awe for a God of truth and justice with which an oath was to be invested. Then, the corruption set in where men refused to honor certain specially-worded vows or promises. Thus, a superstitious show of carefulness for the Divine Name had corroded into sophistries that justified iniquity. The very substitutes for God's Name became, by definition, not binding. Jesus exposes the fallacy: these non-binding substitutes are meaningless unless they have real reference to God. "You swear by **heaven**, but that is God's throne (Isa. 66:1)! You vow by **the earth**, thinking to avoid His throne, but that is His footstool (Isa. 66:1)! You cannot even swear by **Jerusalem** for it is His capital and the seat of His worship (Psa. 48:3, 8). Thus, there is no real way to keep God out of your smallest transactions. God is Owner of the universe and all in it, even the smallest part, yes, even *the hair of man's head*. You cannot even **swear by your**

head, because God made that too and He alone possesses the power to **make your hair white or black**: mention even a hair in an oath and you automatically bring into the question the great Governor of the universe!

What are some modern examples which represent the same evasive reasoning of the scribes? The list could be as long and spiced as human history itself. "Lord have mercy!" "Lord 'a' mercy!" or simply "Lord . . ." "Mercy!" "Merciful heavens!" or simply "Heavens!" are common blasphemy, because they are uttered as an unintended appeal to God for His assistance in a trivial difficulty. These, like "My Lord," began as a sincere expression arising out of a deep religious consciousness, but they are degenerated, like "Hallelujah!" and "praise the Lord!", into meaningless interjections. "God bless you" or simply, ". . . bless you" (after sneezes, of all things!) is just as vulgar in the mouth as "God damn you!" or simply ". . . damn!" or the adjectival form "goddam(ned)." All bywords, which are intended to bypass God's Name but which usually bear the same initials and the same moral responsibility, are likewise condemned by Jesus. The dodge that such interjections are not swearing is invalid, as they would have no meaning otherwise. Such evasion smells of Pharisaic hypocrisy that whined, "I did not use God's Name, but I swore by the Temple!" The use of such interjections is indefensible on two grounds. First, they are usually used as emphatic explosions to impress the hearer with the sincerity or truthfulness of the speaker (Cf. "Hell yes! You're damn' right! Heavens no!"), and as such partake of that nature of oaths from which most of them are historically drawn or for which they are lately substituted. Second, they, being thoughtless, do not reflect that sacred responsibility for every word spoken (Mt. 12:33-37) and may be judged as being more than the simple affirmation (or negation) required by Jesus (5:37; cf. Jas. 5:12). The exact terminology does not matter: if the interjection or additional confirming partakes of the nature of an oath but does not carry with it the solemnity of an oath, it stands condemned on the same grounds as the thoughtless, unintended oaths of the Jews.

II. THE SOLEMN SACREDNESS OF SIMPLE SPEECH

5:37 **But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay.** Simply to tell the truth is quite adequate. The disciple of Jesus is not to honor his word merely because it is supported by an oath, but because

it is sustained by an integrity of character that will honor any and every commitment. (Study II Cor. 1:12-23 for an excellent example of both personal integrity and oath-taking.) Blessed are the pure in heart, for their word is as good as their most solemn pledge. A man's personal integrity is but another word for the quality of his heart. But if the heart be basically false, dishonest, unjust and polluted, the mouth cannot but reveal that condition (Mt. 12:33-37). This man must resort to oaths to guarantee his affirmations, for what other assurance of his truthfulness could he present, if his generally-known lack of integrity could not support it?

Jesus is saying, "Make your life so transparently pure that your simplest statement is easily accepted as valid by your obvious sincerity." Live your whole life under oath! (Col. 3:17) Make your simplest declarations in the full knowledge that God witnesses them and holds you accountable for them. Consequently, all your words must be holy and kept true. This may explain the frequent swearing of Paul (cited above): he was so profoundly obligated before God to tell the truth that he stepped into the witness-stand, almost without realizing it, by calling God to be his Arbiter.

Yea, yea; Nay, nay. Let your speech be exactly what it pretends to be. A "yes" should mean "yes;" "no" should mean exactly that. If you mean "maybe" or "perhaps," then, avoid equivocation by saying so. Thus, one's plain words are pledged by all his character and religion. When a Christian speaks, everyone should know exactly for what he can be counted upon and where he stands. There can be no trick words or evasions which take away personal responsibility for what is said, in order to keep God out of the question. **Whatever is more than these is of the evil (one).** All such frivolous oaths and unnecessary supporting additions, even the necessity for serious vows, finds its basic origin in evil and the father of lies. Why?

1. Because oaths are usually required because of a habitual lack of veracity in the speaker and the common desire to obscure inconvenient or embarrassing truth.
2. Because oaths are used in an evil society in which lying is common.

Christian participation in the common vice certainly will not hasten the day when all men will have learned merely to speak the truth. By this expression, Jesus does not intend to proscribe all oaths, for

oaths themselves are not evil (see on 5:33), but He is merely admitting that His high ideal of personal integrity will not be sufficient always to allay the suspicions of others. James (5:12) gives another valid reason for speaking simply: "lest you fall under condemnation."

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR SINCERE SWEARING AND SPEAKING

A. If you must swear, swear properly. Jeremiah (4:2) lists four characteristics with which any oath must be invested:

1. Swear in truth, only attestation or support of what is really true. Never link God's holy Name with what is false.
2. Swear in justice, only in a just cause worthy of God's Name, never lightly or rashly, but for a sufficient cause that actually requires an oath for confirmation to end the argument.
3. Swear only in righteousness or personal integrity, never with intent to deceive by hypocritical piety and mock solemnity.
4. Swear only by God's Holy Name and by nothing else. If something is so important that an oath must be given, it is worthy of God's Name; if not, it is not important enough to merit an oath. To seek substitutes for His Name is evasive and hypocritical.

B. If you would cure the habit of inordinate swearing:

1. Seek a right knowledge of the majesty of a holy God who will not let go unpunished him who takes His Name uselessly.
2. Reverence Him with all your heart, so that any wrong use of God's Name becomes a shock to your conscience. In a society where profane swearing is common, this shock gets dulled and must be continually sharpened by constant contact with God Himself.
3. Live so sincerely and openly and so truthfully that no one would dream of asking you to give an oath to back up your everyday assertions. Dedicate your whole life to telling just the truth.
4. Reserve your oaths, vows or swearing for the most solemn occasions.

C. If you would apply Jesus' counsel to your own life, remember:

1. Careless and thoughtless use of God's Name is all the more damnable because it implies that kind of selfishness which cares more for self than for God's holiness. The excuse that the oath is meaningless ("I did not mean anything by it!") carries with it a very serious confession that the speaker holds God in such contempt that he may throw around God's Name with impunity. Profanity is nothing but making common and vulgar (profane) what must be regarded with reverence.
2. Exaggerated assertions which tend to lend a false impression are proscribed as inconsistent with simple, truthful speech.
3. Idle or hypocritical promises, that are not intended to be kept, are exposed as lying.
4. Inattentive prayers, in which God is addressed but in which there is no real concentration of thought and in which the mind is allowed to wander over the entire range of immediate interests with only an occasional nod at God, are words which are as empty as meaningless oaths.
5. Praying to be seen of men in order to deceive them into believing that he who prays is a man of extraordinary piety, when in reality he is like those whom he seeks to impress, is condemned.
6. Mechanical prayers, which repeat words that once expressed fervent and real convictions but have since cooled into inattentive, indifferent and idle invocations of God's Name, may be avoided by returning to simple words that accurately represent one's true sentiments.

To put it another way: "Putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another . . . Let no evil come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear." (Eph. 4:25, 29)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What fundamental principle forms the basis of Jesus' summary of the OT Law on swearing?
2. Summarize the basic teaching of the OT on swearing.

3. Explain the reasons why men require and give oaths.
4. Give at least five examples of oaths in the OT, telling who gave the oath, what the oath was supposed to guarantee as true, and the formula used.
5. List five NT oaths, telling who spoke under oath, what the oath was supposed to guarantee as true, and the formula used (if stated).
6. What fundamental principle, essential to the very heart of Christianity, underlies Jesus' advice to keep all speech simple, that is, without confirming affirmations such as oaths?
7. Give one example of a Christian who maintained unflinching personal integrity, yet also bound himself under vows and oaths.
8. God commanded Israel to swear only by His Name. By what process of reasoning did the Jews arrive at swearing by so many other things, to the point that they absolutely refused to name God's Name?
9. What is the basic principle behind Jesus' argument that swearing by heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, etc., missed the very point that the Jews aimed to reach by their circumlocutions?
10. Show how "whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one."
11. What are the basic rules for making a proper oath, according to Jeremiah? Are these rules helpful in our day?

C. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO THE LAW

5. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD PERSONAL VINDICATION.

(Parallel: Lk. 6:27-31)

TEXT: 5:38-42

38. Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
39. but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
40. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.
41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two.
42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is the "law of retaliation" (v. 38) an ethical principle? If so, in what way? If not, what is the ethical principle behind it which makes it necessary?
- b. According to Jesus, what is ethically wrong with the desire to avenge one's honor, one's person or one's family? Why would He urge His disciples not to resist an evil doer?
- c. Why would Jesus specifically mention "thy right cheek" and not "thy left" or say simply "thy cheek"? (Lk. 6:29 uses this latter form) What might be significant about its being the right?
- d. How can one prepare for such an insulting attack in such a way that his first reaction will be that studied self-control with which Jesus challenges His followers? Can you think of other insults (other than a slap on the cheek) which require self-discipline to keep from retaliating? How does one "turn the other cheek," for instance, when he has been slighted? only insulted verbally?
- e. Must Jesus' words be taken literally, i.e. must one actually offer the other cheek in order to obey the Lord?
- f. What does the meek surrender of one's right to fight for his petty claims reveal about that man's character?
- g. Is it ever right to go to law? If not, why not? If so, under what conditions?
- h. How does "going the second mile" make him, who is generous in this way, morally superior to him who compelled him to go the first mile?
- i. From your general knowledge of the NT, provide some general rules which help to interpret and apply Jesus' challenge to "give to him that asks you, and from who would borrow turn not away."
- j. Is it never right to refuse any gift asked by anyone? Under what conditions would it be *wrong* to refuse? Under what conditions would it be *right* to refuse? What ethical principles decide the difference between these two conditions?
- k. Show the practical wisdom in Jesus' sage advice offered in these four illustrations (5:33-37).

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not defend yourself against him who wrongs you. Rather, if someone slaps you on the right cheek,

turn and offer him your left one too. If a man wants to sue for possession of your tunic, let him have it—and your robe as well! If anyone impresses you into the public service to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks something of you, and do not turn your back upon him who wants to borrow something from you. Even if a man takes away something of yours, do not demand its return. You must learn to treat men according to the same standard you want used in their treatment of you.”

SUMMARY

The Mosaic Law limited retaliation to exact punishment measured according to the wrong done. Jesus completely abolishes that spirit of self-vindication which makes such a law necessary, giving four examples: 1. Do not retaliate against insults. 2. Surrender your right to litigate over trifles. 3. Help generously more than is asked. 4. Return good for evil by intelligent liberality.

NOTES

HOW TO MEET EVIL AND OVERCOME

I. The Law's Way, 5:38 **Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.** This is not the language of human scribal interpretations of God's legislation, but the very punitive muscle of Mosaic law itself. Jesus is not quoting any popularization of this law, which degrades it to justify personal revenge, as so many commentators assume. He cites the Law itself. Study the various applications of this precept in Ex. 21:24, 25; Lev. 24:17-21; Dt. 2-21. The purpose of the legal precept was threefold:

1. To protect the rights of persons and property by an equitable judicial settlement. It meant the end to the excesses involved in blood-bath vengeance to clear personal or family honor.
2. To discourage personal revenge by providing a rule intended to govern the decisions of the judges. (Cf. Dt. 19:18) The Law was a real limitation of vengeance and the beginning of mercy, for to the vindicator it said, "You may retaliate thus far and no farther!"
3. To create a mentality of fear to lose a member because of one's own heedless passion which could strike out the eye of another. Thus, in effect, both men's eyes are saved.

Barclay (Vol. I, 162) raises the interesting question whether this law were ever literally carried out. He answers no, since it might involve the reverse of justice by involving the exchange of that which had relatively more value than that for which it was exchanged: a bad eye for a good one, etc. Thus, monetary value was placed by the Jews upon the injury and value payment was made rather than literal retributive damage. (Cf. Ex. 21:29, 30 to see the justice of such an application: of how much more worth is a man than an ox?)

However the application of the precept might have been, so long as he, whose eye or tooth had been knocked out, retaliated against his attacker by exact and legal measure, the letter of Moses' law was satisfied. No doubt some prostituted this judicial rule of thumb into a justification for getting their private revenge without due course of law, but Jesus does not bring up this side of the question. He deals only with the ethical principle which requires that this law be on the books.

Jesus does not criticize the rule itself as used by magistrates. Rather, He sets out to eliminate completely the need for it. The rule is not an ethical principle for personal conduct, since it is a mere punitive rule expressing quite another ethical principle which motivates it and gives it meaning. The real ethical principle back of the rule is the protection of personal or family honor or integrity, and perhaps a sense of justice which requires "blood for blood" retaliation. But this ethical principle is much too low for Jesus. The Lord would show men a higher, more worthy ethic than this primitive tribal ethic of self-revenge.

II. The Lord's Way, 5:39-42 **Do not resist him who is evil.** This principle has caused no little difficulty for those who have not stayed to hear Jesus out, since it seems to urge absolute non-resistance of all evil persons. But . . .

1. The principle must be interpreted in context: Jesus illustrated exactly what He meant by it. The context demands that it be taken as a contrast to the law of retaliation.
2. It must be interpreted in harmony with Jesus' other teachings which urge resistance of evil, even of evil men. (Gal. 2:5, 11; Tit. 1:9-13; cf. I Cor. 5, 6 in which Paul urges resistance of evil and forbids litigation.) This is seen especially in the impact of Jesus' own influence which produced the most

effective moral resistance to evil the world has ever seen. His apostles state that clearly (Eph. 6:11, 13, 14; Heb. 12:4; Jas. 4:7; I Pet. 5:9) His purpose for coming into the world was to attack openly and relentlessly Satan and all those representing his interests (Heb. 2:14; I Jn. 3:8; cf. Mt. 12:28, 29). Jesus' personal example shows how He intended this teaching. He vigorously cleansed the Temple two times of its graft and corruption (Jn. 2:13ff; Mt. 21:12, 13). He bitterly and uncompromisingly exposed the personal hypocrisy of the religious leaders as well as the evil inherent in the system of religion that they upheld. (Cf. Mt. 15:1-20; 16:1-12; 23; Mk. 12:38-40)

3. This principle must be applied to the individual, to whom Jesus addressed it, and must not be applied to states or nations or even to sub-groups within society that do not possess His point of view.

Marshall (116) correctly observes: "In this passage, then, Jesus' thought is concentrated on the question of *non-vindictiveness in personal relations*. All other considerations, obligations, circumstances and needs, are for the moment, left out of account. The question of the maintenance of public law and order is not envisaged; that is something which was simply taken for granted."

Luke (6:27-31) and Leviticus (19:18) connect, by contrast, the desire to take vengeance on the one hand, and on the other, love for one's neighbor even if he be an enemy: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart . . . Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; I am Jehovah." Although the Law itself commanded such high ideals, it was powerless to enforce them in practical ways. While the Law checked this vindictive passion, Jesus shows His disciples how to rise even above the expectations of the Law. He plans to abolish the desire to seek vengeance altogether.

A. BY REFUSING TO RETALIATE (first illustration of the principle)

5:39b But whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. This is a question of one's honor, not a defence of his life, a fact which is established by two reasons: first, this refusal to seek vengeance is in contrast to the cited law

of retaliation which would have rewarded the stricken the opportunity to smite his attacker on his right cheek. Second, the actual form of attack is that of the most insulting contempt, but not an attempt to kill. *Thy right cheek*, as you face your usually right-handed attacker, will be slapped with the back of his right hand. No higher insult could be imagined in almost any society. Yet, Jesus forbids that personal vindictiveness, that unwillingness to forgive that takes the law into its own hands and retaliates. He would remove from the heart that anger, resentment and hate that demands to get even. This He does before the fact, so that the shock and pain of the attack may not catch the disciple unaware and unprepared to react in this most unworldly sort of self-control. Usually words proceed such physical violence and no disciple should fail to heed that inner warning of the impending spiritual crisis. Thus, in place of that desire to revenge self at all costs against whatever threat, Jesus places nobler motivations and considerations, the chief of which is love for that enemy. (Cf. Lk. 6:27-29) Only this kind of active love, which treats the enemy as oneself, is capable of "enduring all things." (I Cor. 13:7) It is almost, if not entirely, impossible to be a peace-maker while seeking revenge. (See on 5:9) While it is true that God will wreak vengeance upon them that do not know and obey Him (II Th. 1:7-10), yet the wrath of man cannot pretend to dispense such perfectly righteous justice. (Cf. Jas. 1:19, 20)

Yes, Jesus' rule is *humiliating*, because we may be taken for spineless cowards if we do not hit back. Such patient meekness is contemptible in the eyes of the world. Jesus' rule is *impossible* for the natural man, whose reflexes are taught to resent and resist every threat to his person or honor. Only God can make it possible to act like Jesus when we are under fire! Jesus' rule is *painful*: there may be that second blow! But we must rather risk that second injury than sin by revenging the first.

When applying Jesus' exhortation, let it be recalled that He Himself did not literally turn the other cheek (Jn. 18:22, 23), but rebuked His smiters, challenging their right to do so. Paul (Ac. 23:3) rebounded in fiery indignation, challenging the mockery of justice that ordered him slapped. But never once did they retaliate with that terrifying, destructive power within their grasp. (Mt. 26:52, 53; Lk. 9:51-55; Ac. 13:6-12.)

B. BY RELINQUISHING ONE'S RIGHT TO RESIST (second illustration)

5:40 **And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.** This is a question of property or possessions, not an involvement of conscience or life. *Thy coat* would be better translated *tunic*, or that inner garment over which the *cloak*, or heavy outer robe was worn. For maximum effect, Jesus is probably assuming that the person He addresses has the legal right to both the tunic and the robe in the question at law. This latter could not be taken even overnight as a pledge from a poor man (Ex. 22:26, 27), because it was such an important item of clothing. Jesus advocates that His followers be ready to give up without litigation even that which, by law, could not be taken. Considered from the point of view of the expenses involved, giving up a full change of clothes is a trifle compared to the relatively higher costs of long litigation. From the ethical standpoint, that meek surrender of one's right to fight for his possessions bespeaks an unselfishness and dignity that rises above petty claims. (Cf. I Cor. 6:1-8; Heb. 10:34)

This, however, is no prohibition of seeking justice through the courts, since defending one's rights by law may also be necessary and right for serious and truly important cases. (Cf. Ac. 16:35-39; 22:25-29; 25:10, 11) Jesus' prohibition intends to discourage that selfish preoccupation with holding possessions that fails to look beyond self to see the true needs of one's opponent. That opponent is selfish too, else he would not be after your tunic. How else can he be taught to be altruistic than by a first-class example of magnanimity in the very one whom he would defraud? Deep love and true concern for him who would wrong you must take precedence over your just rights and claims. Thus, Jesus is not completely forbidding His followers to go to court for any cause, but rather is challenging their motives for so doing. He does not question the *right* to go to law, but the *motive*. To accomplish some higher goal of love, one right a Christian has is that of not insisting on his rights.

Blessed are the meek for the whole earth belongs to them! Why should they haggle over one tunic and a robe? (See on 5:5)

C. BY RENDERING REQUESTED RELIEF WITHOUT RANCOR
(third illustration)

5:41 **And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two.** This compulsion of which Jesus speaks is a historic allusion to the right of those in government service, whether postal couriers or occupation soldiers or others, to impress anyone into service to help them carry forward their own mission. (Cf. Mt. 27:32) Naturally, such impressment would be galling to a subject people as well as inconvenient and fatiguing. Going that *mile* (1000 paces) might mean shouldering a soldier's baggage. To the hyper-sensitive, punctilious Jew this defiling contact with a Gentile would also be a forced self-contamination.

And what does Jesus say about this contaminating, oppressive, hateful service demanded by foreigners? What a shock must have been registered in the audience when He challenged their discipleship to the core: "Do twice as much as is asked of you! Comply cheerfully in excess of the demand." No sullen, complaining spirit here! Considerate helpfulness is the key: no compulsory work which necessarily limits your freedom is to be resented or done hatefully, even if it is *Roman* work to be done.

While this exhortation of Jesus may be a third illustration of the general principle, "Resist not him who is evil," yet Jesus seems to be moving away from a strict interpretation of "him who is evil" in this and the next illustration. The evidence, that He is not following a strict outline which closely demonstrates the principle, may be seen by interpreting the principle more generally: "Do not seek to protect your selfishness or pride in any personal relation with him who would stimulate either." Taken in this latter sense, the general principle is adequately clarified by all four examples. Thus, *whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile* is not necessarily someone who evilly forces you to work, but He means anyone who lays some obligatory service upon you. Humanly we react against this obligation and constriction of our liberties. We react without reflection upon the needs, both immediate and relative as well as eternal and absolute, of him who thus forces us to work. Nor do we regard seriously enough what results in his life our reaction will produce. What kind of business, domestic, national or international relations would result if Jesus' word were taken seriously? (Study some of the apostles' suggestions for applications: Eph. 6:5-8; Phil. 2:14; 4:5; Tit. 3:2; Jas. 3:17; I Pet. 2:18f; Ro. 12:20)

What if God and Jesus had not gone the second mile with us? What is this but mercy? If so, does not this exhortation ("go with him two") become a specific example of how we may be merciful? We have thus turned a bit of servitude, in which we were the subordinates, into a showing of mercy, in which we are the kings!

The foregoing three examples have explained the principle from a negative standpoint: do not seek revenge, do not litigate, do not render grudging service; and from a positive "doubling" formula: be willing to suffering again, surrender more and help twice as much as is asked. The following example follows the Hebrew poetic parallelism, giving two closely-related positive exhortations. (Cf. I Th. 5:15)

D. BY READINESS TO RESPOND WITH RESOURCES (fourth illustration)

5:42 **Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.** This exhortation of Jesus must be considered within the frame of reference in which it was given. The Law had commanded this kind of open-handed generosity to be directed to any countryman who, being impoverished, was no longer able to sustain himself without help. (Ex. 22:25-27; Lev. 25:35-46; Dt. 15:7-15; 23:19, 20) It is within this merciful helpfulness ordained by the Lord that Jesus urges this open-hearted response. *Him that asketh thee* and *him that would borrow*, accordingly, refer to those whose need is real and known or obvious. (Cf. Lk. 6:32-36 to catch this spirit of ready helpfulness.)

Jesus encourages this liberality to respond to genuine needs: widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27), an unfortunate (Jas. 2:14-17; I Jn. 3:17), or someone really hungry, cold, ill-clad, sick or in prison (Mt. 25:35-45). Sometimes gainful employment is the most honorable help to give; other times, food, clothing, etc., according to the need. (See Ac. 11:27-30; Ro. 15:25-28, 31; II Cor. 8, 9; Eph. 4:28; Gal. 6:10, for wider application.)

Jesus' rule must never be interpreted so as to encourage laziness, shiftlessness or greed. Note II Th. 3:6-15 where the practical expression of "disorderliness" is shameless laziness and is worthy of practical excommunication. Paul soundly condemns those busybodies who try to "go around work," (*periergadzomenous*) and urges that they be not fed. Jesus' rule must also be applied consistently with our other duties and obligations. (Cf. I Tim. 5:8; I Th. 4:11, 12) We are

not commanded to dole out daily sustenance to him who will not work, for it would make him a thief to take that to which he has no right.

So how shall Jesus' teaching be applied?

1. *Do not refuse to give:* what or how you will give may have to be decided according to many factors, but you must not close your heart.
2. *Consider the receiver of the gift:* is he a fraudulent beggar or a man in real need? Can you always tell the difference? Better to help a fraud now and then than miss Jesus disguised as "one of the least of His brethren!"
3. *Consider the kind of gift to be given.* Should it be according to his request or according to his real need? Sometimes there is an important difference between these. Is it always possible to know another's real need? Sometimes employment for a wage could restore a man's self-respect like no hand-out ever could. Other men might be saved from poverty by a gift disguised as a "loan." Will the gift contribute to his delinquency by encouraging him to continue begging when he could and should work? Or will it really result in the recipient's best interest by making him a better man?
4. *Give as secretly as possible.* (Mt. 6:2-4) Sometimes the slightest breath of publicity would humiliate the recipient beyond recall, and cause him to hate his benefactor.

CONCLUSION

Plummer (*Luke*, 185) has caught the spirit of Jesus behind each of these four precepts:

What is the spirit? Among other things this:—that resistance of evil and refusal to part with our property must never be a *personal* matter: so far as *we* are concerned we must be willing to suffer still more and to surrender still more. It is right to withstand and even to punish those who injure us: but in order to correct them and protect society; not because of any personal *animus*. It is right also to withhold our possessions from those who without good reason ask for

them; but in order to check idleness and effrontery; not because we are too fond of our possessions to part with them. *So far as our personal feeling goes*, we ought to be ready to offer the other cheek, and to give, without desire of recovery whatever is demanded or taken from us. Love knows no limits but those which love itself imposes. When love resists or refuses, it is because compliance would be a violation of love, not because it would involve loss or suffering . . . In every case, however, we ought to be *willing* to part with what may be lawfully given to any. The wish to keep what we have got is not the right motive for refusing.

Jesus is picturing in these four vivid strokes of the brush how He intends for His disciple to master his own heart by keeping himself free from those natural emotions which too often lead to sin. (Ro. 12:17-21; I Th. 5:15; I Pet. 3:9; 2:21-24; cf. Isa. 50:6; Prov. 20:22; 24:29)

Certain psychological advantages may be found in Jesus' counsel. To offer one's cheek in a spirit of magnanimity to receive that second insult should touch the heart of the adversary, if he has any conscience at all. In this vivid expression of obvious self-control he ought to be able to see who is really the bigger man, and be caused to be ashamed of himself for offering the insult. It takes two to make a fight: what can one do if the other refuses him fight? Again, the willingness to endure wrong may cause a legal adversary to reconsider his own rights in a case, but much depends upon *how* Jesus' disciple shows his refusal to push his claims. The adversary might suppose that he did not have a case anyway and therefore dropped his claims. Though a disciple must risk losing face as well as some property, yet may honorably point out his reasons for believing himself to be in the right and waive his right in favor of the opponent. Considerate helpfulness while doing an unwelcome task should show who is truly the bigger man, the more generous, more longsuffering, more patient in every way. The benefit may fall upon the next man impressed into service, and he may be treated with like consideration, but so what?

Naturally, no moral advantage is gained by a calculating use of Jesus' principles, such as giving in to an adversary in order to placate him, with a view to retaining both tunic and robe, or offering to go two miles with a view of shaming the officer into refusal, or

turning the other cheek in order to humiliate the insulter for striking such an easy target. This calculation with a view to defending one's selfish pride contradicts outright all that Jesus is teaching here. The Master is trying to get us to stop pampering our selfishness and to crucify it in these practical ways.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Summarize the entire Mosaic legislation on retaliation and give several different examples of its application which are offered in the Law itself.
2. Was this law intended for private, personal application by the individual seeking revenge? Who, according to the Law, was to see that the precept was executed properly?
3. What was the purpose of this law of retaliation?
4. Does Jesus criticize the law of retaliation when used as a rule for execution by magistrates? If so, what about it does He criticize? If not, what is the point of the four illustrations He gives which explain what He considers to be in contrast with it?
5. List all the various factors which bear upon the interpretation of Jesus' principle: "Do not resist him who is evil."
6. What is the one point common to all four illustrations, which explains the true meaning of Jesus' principle?
7. List the four illustrations, showing the relation of each to the principle they illustrate.
8. Did the Law of Moses forbid seeking private revenge (without recourse to law) and bearing a grudge?
9. Is the frame of reference for Jesus' first illustration of His principle a question of life and death? Does Jesus' exhortation take into account the problem of self-defence against an attempt to kill?
10. Did Jesus "turn the other cheek" when slapped? Did Paul? Did they retaliate in any way?
11. Could the robe ("cloak") be taken by law? What is the ethical force of Jesus' advice regarding it?
12. Does Jesus prohibit a Christian's going to court to defend some cause he deems truly important? Prove your answer.
13. What is the historic connection involved in the phrase "compel thee to go one mile"? (Who compelled? Why? Why one mile? etc.)

C. THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN RELATION TO THE LAW

6. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD PERFECT LOVE. (Parallel Lk. 6:32-36)

TEXT: 5:43-48

43. Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy:
44. but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you;
45. that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.
46. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?
47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others?* do not even the Gentiles the same?
48. Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What happens to men when they allow themselves to hate?
- b. What is the basis for the distinction we make between those whom we call "enemies" and those whom we call "friends"? Is this a proper distinction?
- c. What kind of "enemy" does Jesus have in mind: personal? national? just anyone who is hostile to us?
- d. How should Jesus' teaching be applied with reference to one's national enemies? If a man is not sure that his nation has a just cause in war, should he allow himself to be made part of its army? If he is reasonably sure that his nation has a just cause, how should he treat or regard those who will be enemy soldiers?
- e. Is it possible to *like* someone who is personally hostile to us and is trying his best to thwart our every design? Is it possible to *love* him? What is the difference?
- f. Is it possible to say that love is the perfect law? What makes you think so? What do you mean by "law" here?
- g. Are laws themselves ethical principles, or are there ethical principles behind the laws which cause them to be written?

- h. What is the relationship between the principle of love and laws, as these latter are found in any code of law?
- i. If a person be governed by love, does he need to be governed by law? If not, why not? If so, what is the function of the law in this case?
- j. Is it possible that the word "perfect," as used by Jesus (5:48), produce very different effects in those who hear it? In other words, how would the sinner react to this demand? How may the disciple respond to it?
- k. How does the standard of Jesus surpass all standards known to man?
- l. How does Jesus make it possible to grow into such a standard?
- m. Are you absolutely perfect yet? If not, what provisions are made for your perfection? What if you die in that imperfect condition?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you who will really listen, Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who insult and persecute you, in order to act like your heavenly Father. Yes, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. You will have a rich reward and you will be truly sons of the Most High. He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. He makes His sun rise on the evil as well as on the good people, and sends His rain on the just and unjust alike. Be compassionate just like your Father is merciful.

"For if you love those who love you, what thanks could you expect? Do not even tax collectors and sinners do as much? And if you greet only those within your own circle, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the pagans do that much? And if you return good deeds only to those who do good to you, what virtue is there in that? For even sinners do the same thing. And if you lend only to those from whom you expect to get it back, what is extraordinary about that? Even sinners lend to each other, to get back the same amount in full.

"You, therefore, are to be perfect—as perfect as your heavenly Father is!"

SUMMARY

A summary of practical Jewish morality revealed an ethically inadequate lovelessness and partiality, although it had seemed perfectly rational. But God's personal mercifulness undoubtedly ignores such spurious justifications and distinctions, since He blesses even those who spite Him in every way. Sectarian selfishness and calculating courtesies are typical of those who make no pretences to knowledge or service of God. But Jesus expects nothing less than the perfection of God as a standard for His disciple.

NOTES

I. AN ANCIENT ADAGE AMMENDED

A. THE ANCIENT ADAGE

5:43 **Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.** The first phrase is as old as the Law itself and is left unchanged by the Lord. (Lev. 19:18) There is no point in mentioning Jesus' omission of "as thyself" since His correction (vv. 44-48) takes no notice of the omission. Jesus is not quoting a popular Pharisaic tradition which omits this measurement of love. Rather, as He quotes it, the first phrase balances more neatly the second phrase which He intends to correct.

Hate thine enemy. While this is not a direct precept of the Mosaic Law, it is a true representation of its practical application. Though there were precepts enjoining love for the individual foreigner sojourning in the land (Lev. 19:33, 34) and civil rights and courtesies equal to those due any native Hebrew, nevertheless the fear of contamination by idolatry, through any kind of social contact with their surrounding pagan neighbors, caused the Jews to heed those commands which enforced their separatism. (Ex. 23:20-33; 34:11-16; Num. 31; Dt. 7:1-5, 16; 10:10-18; 23:3-6) True, they often compromised these instructions, but their being reprimanded for these failures, which threatened to erase their distinctiveness, helped to create that attitude inherent in the commands themselves: show your enemies no mercy; destroy them entirely. Further, in the same context with the precept to vanquish their enemies completely is found expressed God's own attitude of strict retribution, almost as if to provide Israel an example for imitation (see Dt. 7:9-11), even as Jesus offers God's example in the present section as an example for imitation of

His mercy. In the one case, Israel's religious distinctiveness was at stake; in this case, it is not. Rather, impartial love is the question, and the purpose for Israel's separatism is already realized and needs no further protection. Perfect love is more capable of preserving religious separation than any amount of warring against one's enemies, even though this latter expedient was necessary to prepare that primitive people for the coming of Jesus who could reveal such love. Nevertheless, godly men, living under such laws, felt this hatred. (Cf. Ps. 18; 35; 55:8-15; 59; 69:18-27; 137.7-9; 139:21, 22) And they practiced it. (Cf. I Chron. 21:1-3)

This is not to deny the totally unjustifiable distortions of God's intent for such legislation. God never intended that Israelites should detest or refuse to love a personal foe. Rather, kindness and practical generosity were to be used toward him. (Ex. 23:4, 5; Prov. 24:17, 18; 25:21; cf. Notes on 5:21)

Is not such hate also the natural outgrowth of self-righteousness which so straitly identifies itself with the cause of righteousness that the self-righteous cannot conceive of God's plans as having any expression except through him and his group? This is the "we-are-right-let-those-who-disagree-with-us-go-to-hell" spirit seen in all sectaries just as much in the "orthodox and faithful" as in the "errorists and false teachers."

B. THE AMENDMENT

5:44 **But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you.** Far from pampering the prejudices of His audience, which grovelled under the Roman yoke, having known one oppressor after another since the beginning of the great captivities, Jesus shows Himself the true Patriot. He offers them the only way to improve relations with ANY enemy, personal or national. This word of love must have aroused resentment in some who had unusually bad relations with tax collectors and Roman soldiery. How these words would have stung on the ears of those who were just living for the day when they personally might draw Roman blood and drive the hated occupation army out of Palestine!

But this word *enemy* covers the whole realm of those who oppose one: personal antagonists, business competitors, political opponents, social rivals. This is evidenced in the Law by the more or less personal relations between the antagonists, which would have

permitted deeds of kindness to him. (See Ex. 23:4, 5; Prov. 24:17-18; 25:21) The fact that Jesus places the emphasis on loving our enemies, rather than upon loving our neighbors, should remind us that that hateful quality in some of our neighbors which makes them our enemies must not cause us to forget that they are, after all, neighbors to love. Jesus is not saying that our enemies are somehow not our neighbors, merely because He does not identify the two here, since He does identify them elsewhere. (Lk. 10:29-37)

At first view, what Jesus commands seems impossible due to the many misconceptions of the meaning of the word *love*. What is this *love* which Jesus requires?

1. Clear examples, which explain His meaning, are offered immediately in this context:
 - a. *Pray for those who persecute you.* No man can honestly pray for another and continue to hate him; rather, he will try to understand his enemy's real need and the reasons which make him that way. Such magnanimity must necessarily destroy rancor and desires to retaliate.
 - b. Impartial generosity (See on 5:45)
 - c. Social courtesy (See on 5:46)
 - d. Readiness to reconcile; refusal to hold in contempt (5:21-26)
 - e. Refusing to hate a member of the opposite sex by lusting after them (5:27-30)
 - f. Destroying enmity for one's society by resisting the temptation to create a situation which would undermine it (5:31, 32)
 - g. Rejecting false, deceiving oaths by simple honest speech (5:33-37)
 - h. Returning good for evil (5:38-42). Luke's parallel (6:27-36) actually mixes these applications with the precept, making just one integrated section where Matthew has two.

Thus, Jesus' meaning is exemplified in these examples of actions, deeds and attitudes, and not merely through a sentiment.

2. Other examples of loving one's enemies:
 - a. The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37)
 - b. Jesus on the cross (Lk. 23:34)
 - c. Stephen being martyred (Ac. 7:60)
 - d. David spared Saul's life (I Sam. 24, 26)

So we see, even before examining the word *love* itself we have before us a clear concept of its meaning intended by the Author, derived from the examples He gives of its manifestation. The exact meaning of Jesus' word (*agapate*) must be gathered from the context in which He uses it, due to the interchangeability of the two Greek words usually used to express this relationship between persons.

For studies in *agapê* and *philia* and their verbs *agapaô* and *phileô*, compare Arndt-Gingrich, pp. 4-6, 866, 867, where their interchange is noted. But see Butler, *John*, II 454-456 and Hendriksen, *John*, II, 494-500, where excellent reviews of the differences are given.

From the way Jesus illustrated what He means, we learn:

3. What Jesus does NOT mean. He does not intend just a natural compassion or good-naturedness, a natural affection or fondness. Nor can He imply a blanket, general love which takes in wholesale an enemy nation, or the whole corrupt political machine, or an entire religious denomination, but rather He intends a love for the individual, detached from the movement he represents. It is not a tender sentiment similar to that which binds us to our nearest and dearest. It is not something that we cannot help, because Jesus commands us to do something about it. This love commanded is not an ethical principle for application by society *en masse*, but by the individual, since it was to the latter that He addressed it. Nor does Jesus mean that love must ignore criminal actions and refuse to discipline due to a pretended "love" for the unscrupulous, undisciplined and criminal.
4. What Jesus DOES mean: by the word *love* He intends a purposeful, intelligent, comprehending love which cannot ignore the hatefulness and wickedness of the enemy, but seeks in every way to free him from the sin which blinds and binds him to those passions that drive him to be what he

is. This love commanded is a matter of the will, a victory over that which comes instinctively even to publicans and sinners. This love is something that we have to will ourselves into doing, not an emotion that comes to us unbidden. This love is a determination of the mind expresses itself in invincible good will to all men alike by always doing what is in the best interest of each. Jesus insists that each disciple take His fiat seriously as a basis of their personal relationships.

Is not this *love* the empowering ethical principle that motivates all of the "impossible" demands of Jesus? Not only does this love far surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, but it raises the standard so far above all law, especially that of Moses, that it touches the perfect character of God! Instead of this precept being a mere lovely theory, it is practical to the last degree, because it puts every motive to the test, challenges every action and rejects automatically all conduct that would be a violation of love. This latter feature is accomplished without any recourse to that inferior conduct motivation or moral control known as *law*. Thus, Jesus is revealing a means of conduct control that for its excellence far surpasses any and all legal systems. It is superior because the constraints of love must bring about a complete moral transformation in man by causing him to re-examine his entire character and bring it into line with the demands of his love.

Conversion, then, is not so much a miraculous process as it is a rational introspection into one's heart to determine wherein the individual is not loving God and his fellows, and a thorough-going determination to act conscientiously according to the dictates of this true love. God's part in conversion, therefore, is His provision of the key that unlocks this whole series of conversions in every area of life. The key is simply His own love which stimulates us to love (I Jn. 4:7-21). In other words, Jesus is saying, "Love God and your neighbor perfectly, and everything else will take care of itself." Who needs rules to force him to act, whose heart is entirely converted by the very ethical motivation that requires such rules be written for the ethically unmotivated?

But the original command of God was: "*Love your neighbor* (and Jesus says this means our enemy too) **AS YOURSELF.**" What a standard! How far-reaching! How do we express this self-love? Our love for

ourselves is unhyprocritical, ardent, active, habitual and constant. It respects our interests, is tenderly concerned about our welfare, takes genuine pleasure in promoting our success and happiness: we just cannot do enough for ourselves! The test, then, of our love for the other fellow is not merely our fondness for him, but the trouble we are willing to take and the sacrifices we are prepared to make for his benefit. Luke (6:31) inserts the golden rule right in the middle of his account of this section, thereby suggesting that the acid test of love is *deeds*, not merely sweet sentiments. Twice he quotes Jesus as saying, "Love your enemies and do good . . ." (Lk. 6:27, 35; cf. Ro. 12:17-21)

Should someone object that the cost of love is too high (I Jn. 3:16), the cost of hatred is even greater! (I Jn. 3:15) He who would shut out his neighbor's need from his heart, likewise shuts out the love of God!

II. THE ALMIGHTY, AN ACKNOWLEDGED AUTHORITY ON ALTRUISM

5:45 **that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.** This is the first reason Jesus urges us to love our enemies: that we might be like God. God is the very author and example of this outgoing love of others. (Ro. 5:5-8; I Jn. 4:7-12) Our pattern and measure of love is to be no less than His!

Love that you may be sons expresses the purpose of our loving those who certainly do not love us. The word *be* (*genēsthe*) might be translated *become*, thus suggesting that this love is, in the final analysis, the only real means of growing into the image of the Son of God (cf. Ro. 8:29), and this recalls 5:9 where those who imitate God will be called His sons. (See notes there) The central idea is this: moral likeness proves one's true parentage. (Contrast Jn. 8:39-47) To the Jews present that day, the phrase "sons of your Father" would have been readily grasped in its general Hebraistic sense of likeness or chief characteristic. (See Gesenius, 126) Accordingly, Jesus is saying, "Love that you may be like God, or godly, godlike." However, Jesus' word must not be construed to mean that one may become a "son of God" merely by the exercise of some brand of neighborly love which bypasses regeneration! Truly, such impartial loving as Jesus expects is impossible without regeneration. Though

this love is the ready test of sonship, yet one is not necessarily a son if he ignores the father's instructions for becoming a son. (Cf. Gal. 3:26, 27)

The honest man, whose conscience has been stabbed by Christ's message and who feels keenly his own imperfection, will be reminded that God did truly bless him even in his sinfulness. Such a disciple will be motivated to bless and help men, especially his enemies, loving them as God had first loved him. This is God's reason for continuing to bless even those who by their continued impiety dare Him to destroy them. His goodness could melt their stubborn hearts, causing them to repent (Ro. 2:4; I Tim. 1:12-17). Thank God that He does not bless us on the basis of our capricious and relative goodness! Thus, ours is to be a perfect interest in people that is closely identified with God's concern for them. (Cf. Eph. 4:31—5:1)

III. THE ABSURDITY OF ACTING ACCORDING TO AVERAGE ATTITUDES

5:46, 47 See the PARAPHRASE/HARMONY for Luke's significant additions here. Jesus' second reason for loving the unlovely and unloveable, is that refusal to do so is conduct no better than that of the worst of men. That choice to love only those who are beautiful, desirable, and who will reciprocate love, is nothing but that same cruel, callous, calculating partiality practiced by any hypocrite! James (2:1-17) drives home the heinous injustice of partiality.

Publicans, Gentiles: Luke in this place says simply *sinners*, while Matthew, writing more to a Jewish standpoint, mentions two classes which to Jews were sinners without equals. The *publicans* were the collectors who did the foot-work, actually gathering the Roman taxes for their Roman bosses. To a subject people like the Jews, not only the taxes to support their rulers, but also these merceneries who collaborated with their conquerors to collect the money, would be hated and despised as traitors to their people. The stigma attached to the profession naturally precluded the accepting the occupation by any good men who had any regard for the good opinion of their countrymen. Obviously, this left the office to those who had less self-respect to lose and no reputation to protect and often few principles. Considered as traitors as well as grafters, they were regarded as entirely out of fellowship with God. (Cf. Lk. 3:12, 13; 19:1-9; 15:1, 2; 18:9-14) On *Gentiles*, see on 5:43 to grasp this purely Jewish allusion.

What reward have you? . . . What do you more than others? These rhetorical questions are calculated to call His hearers to make a personal judgment, or perhaps to call attention to His judgment intimated in His question: "If one loves and salutes only his most intimate friends and family, he is acting just like those whom he would class as flagrant sinners. Worse yet, he is sharing their sin of partiality." Here the Master exposes the proud snob for the hypocrite he really is, since he would probably claim to love all men and yet he would rationalize such party loyalty as would salute only its own clique, clan or club. Party spirit and clan loyalty have been scored by the apostles as well. (Gal. 5:20; Jude 19; I Cor. 1-4) That unhypocritical love which embraces even the repulsive and hateful really goes beyond these average attitudes and actually does more than others. (Ro. 12:9; II Cor. 6:6; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 6:5-9; Phil. 2:3, 4; I Pet. 1:22) Christian love must be unlike human love which is often no more than a self-interested affection. In other words, we must never let our natural likes and dislikes become the rule of our life or the test of our love, since real love carries us into the lives of those for whom we have no natural affinity. To break the force of our clannish habits, let us begin to associate with men, not because they are congenial to us or agree with us, but because they need our compassion and understanding. Let us cultivate those outside "our" group. (Cf. Lk. 5:27-32; 7:36:50; 14:12-14; 15:1, 2; Jn. 4:1-42)

Salute was a word loaded with connotations of friendship, acceptance and fellowship, just as the oriental salutation was a vigorous personal contact consisting of a cordial embrace, a kiss on both cheeks and inquiries about the welfare of each member of the other's family. Thus, Jesus is asking quite a bit more than a simple "good morning" of His disciples: if you are only cordial with your little circle, what do you do that is so different?

In this admonition, Jesus, having shown the weakness of such distinctions that selfishness must create, now corrects the absurdity of thinking that one could really live in love and yet show practical favoritism. Edersheim (*Life*, II, 237) observes:

That question, 'Who is my neighbor?' has ever been at the same time the outcome of Judaism (as distinguished from the religion of the OT), and also its curse . . . God had separated Israel unto Himself by purification and renovation—and this is the original meaning of the word 'holy' and 'sanctify' in the Hebrew. They separated themselves in self-righteousness

and pride—and this is the original meaning of the word 'Pharisee' and 'Pharisaism'. . . . Before we sit in harsh judgment on these Jews, let us remember how often professing Christians have restricted the circle of Christian love until it embraces no more than pagan love, i.e. those who love us and salute us.

IV. ASPIRING TO ATTAIN THE ABSOLUTE

5:48 Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus' idea of real religion or true righteousness is to make us like God, nothing else or nothing less! McGarvey puts it right: though it be impossible for such sinners as we to reach this perfection yet anything short of it is short of what we ought to be. In fact, one sure rule to remember must be: if you think you have arrived at this perfection, you have not. The closer we approach the perfection of God and thus the more intimate grows our knowledge of the Father, the more we will be humbled and dissatisfied with our accomplishments.

But what is Jesus driving at? Surely He must know that we could not struggle up to the heights of that far inferior standard of Moses' Law, and if THAT were too difficult for us, how could He expect us even to begin thinking about aiming for God's perfection? We must cry out in dark despair, "Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner that I am!" But this was exactly His point: to bring us to our knees asking Him what we must do. (See introduction to the Sermon) Carver (81) raises that important philosophical problem: "Could we follow Jesus as we do if He had for us any lower standard of morals and ethics than perfection, if He could be content until He has made us true sons and daughters of His perfect Father?" Probably not, for we would ever suspect that there yet remain a final answer above and beyond Jesus, however satisfied we might be with His good standards. But being brought up face to face with THIS standard, we may rest assured that there are no higher standards, and it is with THIS one that we have to deal, decide, do or die!

HOW TO BE PERFECT

Let us, however, not permit our despair of ever reaching such an exacting standard to become an excuse for ignoring Jesus as an unrealistic dreamer whose schemes for human moral improvement are unworkable. Let us remain at least long enough to hear Him explain His idea.

A. BY LOVING PERFECTLY

Interpreting Jesus' word in context, we see that Jesus is saying something very simple and yet so profound: "He who loves like the heavenly Father loves, is thoroughly equipped to grow into absolute perfection. He who loves, needs no other rules or standards, for he will always act in the best interest of his neighbor, friend or enemy. To love consistently is to be perfect."

This interpretation harmonizes with the propositions of the Apostles. "Whoever practices obedience to His message really has a perfect love of God in his heart." (I Jn. 2:5 CBWilliams) "No one has ever seen God; yet if we practice loving one another, God remains in union with us, and our love for His attains perfection in our hearts. (I Jn. 4:12 CBW; cf. I Jn. 4:17, 18) One's faith is perfected by what he does (Jas. 2:22), if it is a faith which works through love (Gal. 5:6). Only intense love can hold a man steadfast in trials and thus be perfected (Jas. 1:2-4). And, most important of all, no law is capable of making anybody perfect (Heb. 7:19; 9:9; 10:1; cf. Ro. 2:12; 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 8:3). All law must render man imperfect in his own eyes and frustrate his attempts to be perfect. Perfect loving, on the other hand, has in it the seed-germ capable of making man entirely perfect.

By commanding men to be "perfect," Jesus DID mean them to be "sinless," since the essence of sin is lovelessness. There is no moral perfection but where perfect love has made sin impossible. Sins, by definition, are those acts which express man's selfishness and his failure to love his neighbor or his God at some given point of contact. Sin is not only or merely "transgression of the law" (I Jn. 3:4; Ro. 3:20 etc.), although it is this too, but is more the refusal to love (I Jn. 3:11-18; 4:8, 17-21). Laws are but the muscles of love, given to punish those who are unable or unwilling to be governed directly by love. Laws merely describe and forbid unethical behavior, but the behavior itself is sin because, in one way or another, it disobeys the dictates of love. Contrarily, love is the fulfilling of any law. (Mt. 22:36-40; Ro. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; 6:2) True righteousness IS love and as such is not subject to law; rather, love is the maker of laws where they are necessary. (Gal. 5:22, 23) All standards of right and wrong will be perfectly fulfilled by the man who always does what is in the best interest of his neighbor, i.e. loves him completely. This is the genius of Christianity and the

very reason why Jesus refused to spell out in detail what constitutes true righteousness, lest men mistake His word for another law! By just commanding love, He covered the whole gamut of human relations like no detailed law could ever do.

B. BY BEING DECLARED "PERFECT"

Thus, the very admission that we do not love as we should, condemns us for our imperfection. How can God admit anything less than perfection? God has solved this dilemma by choosing to declare perfectly righteous those who will believe Jesus, depend entirely upon Him, and thus regard His perfection as their own. (Ro. 8:1-4; II Cor. 5:17-21; I Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:8, 9; Col. 1:12, 22, 28; 2:10) Thus, all that is imperfect in the Christian is judged to be perfect, because it is viewed as perfected by the perfection of Christ. This is only possible because of the disciple's position *in Christ*. This perfection of the Christian is a *judicial* declaration, quite irrespective of his personal maturity. This declaration is entirely based upon the Christian's dependence (faith) upon Jesus to be his righteousness, sanctification, justification and redemption. (Heb. 10:14)

C. BY GROWING UP INTO THE STANDARD

Teleios, the word translated by our word "perfect," can mean all that our word signifies, i.e. absoluteness, the highest degree of excellence. Yet it means more. (See Arndt-Gingrich, 816, 817) Perfection is obviously *relative*, relative to the goal, end, purpose or aim (*telos*) sought. Something is perfect when it accomplishes the purpose for which it was planned. Thus, *teleios* is used to describe persons "of full age, full-grown, mature, adult" (I Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13-16; Heb. 5:14) and, by extension, it describes those who are spiritually mature (Phil. 3:15; Col. 4:12). It was also a technical term of the ancient mystery religions, which refers to him who had been initiated into the mystic rites. To this latter class may belong such passages as: I Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28, where the translation would be "the initiate, the insider." Then, *teleios* has at least four other instances (Mt. 19:21; Jas. 1:4b; 3:2; perhaps Col. 4:12) of the absolute idea of full moral development to the highest degree of excellence. Which of these four ideas describes Jesus' meaning in this text? That depends upon who is listening to Him.

1. *To the Outsider*: If Jesus is talking to the sinner, endeavoring to drive him to practical despair of ever being good enough, then Jesus means for the sinner to be shaken by that word "perfect" in all of its harsh absoluteness. The man of the world must understand the futility of trying to justify himself before God by any kind of standard less than perfection. The outsider would not have it in him to reach such a lofty norm. Assuming that God is so loving and impartial as to bless him even when he is yet a sinner (5:45), he could safely conclude that this God also has a means of salvation from this inexorable justice, and come to Jesus seeking answers.

2. *To the Insider*: If Jesus intends His teaching to be a guide to righteousness for all future generations of His disciples, then He may mean "maturity, adulthood," as understood in the relative sense. No *teleios* adult would admit to being absolutely perfect in every quality that, together with other qualities, renders him *teleios*, and yet he is *teleios*, adult or mature. To the Christian, then, perfection or maturity is not a terrifying, impossible standard, since Jesus has revealed His secrets for arriving there. Jesus' secret power to transform men into the image of God, a secret only to those who refuse to see it, is the influence of that all-encompassing command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Out of such love flows all those deeds that may be called "righteousness."

Jesus' ideal is neither an impossible nor an impractical ethic. Rather it is the bloodstream of the New Testament. (Study Ro. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 3:7-17; I Tim. 1:5) As an ideal, Jesus must require absolute perfection (in degree); as a practical expectation, Jesus may look for a growing perfection (in kind) which has in it the capacity to transform man into God's likeness.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Locate the OT Law of love, cited by Jesus. (book, chapter, verse)
2. Explain the rise of the axiomatic exhortation to hate one's enemy. Did God command such hate? What divine commands might lead to this conclusion? Did God intend for a Jew to bear personal grudges or hate a personal opponent? Prove your answer.
3. Did godly men in the OT hate their enemies? Prove it.
4. What information may be drawn from the context, that helps to understand the meaning of the word "love," as Jesus intended it?

5. List the two examples, positive and negative, given by Jesus as examples of how we should and should not love.
6. Why does Matthew bring up *publicans* and *Gentiles*? What is the Jewish viewpoint regarding these two groups?
7. Who were the publicans?
8. What does *perfect* mean, as used by Jesus? What else could it mean?
9. What other NT passages use the word *perfect*, which throw light on Jesus' meaning?

CHAPTER SIX

D. THE MOTIVES OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 6:1-18)

1. HIS BASIC MOTIVE. (Mt. 6:1)

TEXT: 6:1

1. Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

2. HIS MOTIVATION FOR DOING OTHERS GOOD. (Mt. 6:2-4)

TEXT: 6:2-4

2. When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.
3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
4. that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Are we not supposed to do our good works "before men, that they may be seen of them and glorify the Father who is in heaven"? (Mt. 5:16) How, then, may we harmonize these two ideas: doing good works to be seen of men and not doing our righteousness to be seen of men? (6:1)
- b. Why is sincerity a quality so imperative to living the godly life? or, why does Jesus warn His disciples against public display of their righteousness?
- c. How is it true that one receives his reward when he does his righteousness to be seen by men?
- d. Is secrecy an absolutely essential ingredient which validates all of our religious acts, for example, our giving, service to others, prayer or fasting? Does Jesus intend "in secret" absolutely or relatively? In other words, what happens to the efficacy of one's "righteousness" if someone should see it?

- e. What difference would it make between one means of giving alms or another, if the giver failed to apprehend the right concept of what constitutes true riches and where they should be sought? (cf. 6:19-21)
- f. Is it wrong to tell others what we do for God? Is there ever any justification for doing so? What reservations would you have about doing so?
- g. Analyze the process of becoming a hypocrite. Point out the motivations, the temptations, the factors which cause a man to inmesh himself in a net of pretense. Apply your analysis to the Pharisees, endeavoring to show the steps by which they became what they were.
- h. How is it possible that such expressions of sincere love for God or outgoing helpfulness to one's fellows, like prayer and almsgiving, should become the very means of expressing one's hypocrisy?
- i. Do you think that it is always possible to determine whether a man is carrying out his religious duties (alms, prayer, fasting, etc.) from ulterior motives and not rather from earnestly sincere ones? While it may be easy to describe a hypocrite, can you always be sure you have one identified in an actual person?

PARAPHRASE

"Take care not to perform your religious duties in public with an eye to being noticed by others. If you do, you have no wages coming from your Father in heaven.

"Thus, when you give money to the poor, do not announce the fact with a fanfare of trumpets, like the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you that they have received their wages in full. But, on the other hand, when you give money to the poor, your left hand must never know what your right hand is doing, that your charity be secret. Your Father who sees what is secret will pay you.

SUMMARY

Jesus states a simple, commercial truth: a man is the servant of him for whom he works, regardless of any pretences to the contrary, and from his true employer he may expect his due and from no other. The Lord's admonition is clear: hypocrisy involves trying to please both God and man, but God accepts no second place to any man. Therefore, stop trying to please men if your one desire is to serve God!

NOTES

1. HIS BASIC MOTIVE: He serves God disinterestedly (6:1)

Jesus has not changed His subject, because this section (6:1-18) is but an examination of the religious motives of His disciple, which, as the true explanation of the disciple's actions, must far exceed the "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." (Cf. 5:20) The immediate connection with the foregoing section (5:43-48) should also be clear: even the most sincere are sometimes turned aside from their seeking to be perfect in the Father's judgment (5:48) by the praise or censure of men. Therefore, true righteousness, according to Jesus, is just trusting God and trying to do all that He says, with a view to pleasing Him only. Again, as preparation for the section which follows (6:19-34), this part lays the essential groundwork by exposing superficial religionists who would try to serve both God and their own interests at the same time.

To Jesus, religion and morality must be identified with each other: without religion, morality has no basis outside man himself and is worthless; without morality, all religious acts are valueless and the proof of a bogus religion. Therefore, religion meets its test in the deeds it produces; not mere acts, but deeds which proceed from a heart of active faith in God. The faith which will not express itself in the obvious expressions of faithful devotion is nothing but an apparition, a phantom. (Mt. 25:31-46; Gal. 2:10; 6:10; Jas. 1:27) But deeds of righteousness may not be done from human favor, even though we express our righteousness by means of our actions toward men. We must not do "our righteousness" because of social conventions, or because men expect us to do so, but because we belong to Jesus, and because we want to express God's generosity in the world. The reason Jesus must speak so frankly here is that there is a danger that His disciples be prone to succumb to the often ungodly influences of their associations in the world, to the point that they seek their praise rather than that of God. To the Christian, it matters not with what kind of associations he must live—whether with husband, wife, business associates, social pleasures or whatever—because their conduct, praise or expectations are not to control him.

But let us look beyond His criticism of those hypocrites of His generation to see how prophetic and universal is the application of His critique to our hypocrisies today. For unless we apprehend that

right relation with God which must prompt and pervade all of our "righteous" acts, we will do little better than did they for whom Jesus had such searching judgments. Here in this section, Jesus brings the Kingdom man up short to look at himself in the mirror of motives, saying, "Be honest now: what are your real motives for your religious acts?" It is too easy to overlook completely this critical question as to why we do what we do, while concentrating on how or what we say or do. The Lord is sure that if a man is not perfectly honest with God, all of his other acts or relationships cannot possibly be sound. Jesus must challenge the motives for all our good deeds, by striking telling blows against our desire for human notice and recognition, against our ostentation and our hypocrisy.

The Pharisees and scribes were "past masters" in this dubious art (Mt. 23:5, 6). ISBE (article: "Pharisees" 2364) provides the explanatory background:

In a time when religion is persecuted, as in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, or despised as it was in the Hellenizing times which preceded and succeeded, it would be the duty of religious men not to hide their convictions. The tendency to carry on this public manifestation of religious acts after it ceased to be protest would be necessarily great. The fact that they gained credit by praying at street corners when the hour of prayer came, and would have lost credit with the people had they not done so, was not recognized by them as lessening the moral worth of the action. Those who, having lived in the period of persecution and contempt, survived in that when religion was held in respect, would maintain their earlier practice without any *arrière-pensée* (mental reservation, HEF). The succeeding generation, in continuing the practice, consciously "acted." They were *poseurs*. Their hypocrisy was none the less real that it was reached by unconscious stages.

Another factor which enters into the question of what makes a hypocrite is our marvelous ability to do things by habit. This faculty permits man to progress from one learned skill to another, without having to repeat each action consciously. But this very capacity represents also a dire menace to man's sincerity in the area of personal relations with others and with God. For when religion becomes habitual, the mind can easily go elsewhere while the body automatically continues the external acts called "worship."

In 5:21-48, Jesus proved that bad motives in the heart always produce wicked deeds and that the motives themselves are condemned as well as the deeds; here He demonstrates that a sinister motive even vitiates a good deed. There is such a thing as being damned for doing the right thing in the wrong way or from the wrong motives. Now, in an exacting religion where public esteem is granted to the most pious, it is humanly natural that those, who refuse to pay the price for the necessary character, should seek to counterfeit the actions of the pious, in order that they too might enjoy the acclaim of their peer group. Being empty-hearted, they often resort to quite shoddy imitations of real religion, because their express purpose is that of keeping up appearances and of exalting themselves to get what they want and they wish to pay as little as possible. But the better imitations involve taking those acts, which should be real expressions of sincere love for God and out-going helpfulness to one's fellows, and sucking out of them all of the original, right motivation. Thus, they become acts which are regarded as having merit in themselves, without regard to the heart motives of the doer. The nature of such hypocrisy is unaffected by the problem as to whether or not the one who fakes the conduct of the righteous really accepts as valid the standard which motivates the righteous to act as they do. Their avowed purpose is **doing their righteousness before men to be seen of them**, since they have come to look upon these acts as a means of purchasing the respect of men and the favor of God. (Cf. 6:2)

Earlier (5:16), Jesus urged that our purposes and sole motives be to live so that our actions stimulate men to glorify God. For this to occur, these actions must of necessity "be seen of men," but there is no necessary contradiction with the present passage, since the real issue is settled in the heart, in the desires, and not in the external act itself. The problem is not whether the deeds are seen or not, but whether we seek the glory of God or of men.

Else ye have no reward with your Father. It should be self-evident, but seldom is, that the value of praise is to be determined not merely by what is said and meant, but by the stature and character of the one who thus grants his approval. The shallow acclaim of the immediate crowd often provides exciting food for the self-seeking, and under this stimulus one may strive to do even greater eye-catching wonders. But, having no intention to do God's will sincerely, such doers of great works are already judged by God as

being corrupt. Their "righteousness" is SIN regardless of the magnitude of their deeds. (Cf. 7:21-23; I Cor. 13:1-3) Ironically, the praise they sought proved to be worthless toward gaining entrance into the Kingdom. In fact, it cost many their one great opportunity to gain it. (Cf. Jn. 5:44; 12:42, 43) Only a fool would grasp after the transient, empty praise that men can give, only to lose the eternal reward of the Father. On *reward*, see below on 6:4, 6, 18 and the introductory essay: "The Reasonableness of the Redeemer's Rewarding of Righteousness."

NOTE: The KJV has "take heed that ye do not your alms . . ." instead of "righteousness" at 6:1. The word translated "alms" (*eleēmosunēn*) is supported only by the Washington manuscripts from the IV or V century and other later manuscripts. The ASV and all other modern versions follow the better reading, "righteousness" (*dikaiōsunēn*), supported by the manuscripts Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, both of the fourth century, as well as other important witnesses.

2. HIS MOTIVES FOR DOING OTHERS GOOD: He gives and serves without ostentation. (6:2-4)

6:2 **Sound not a trumpet.** This is a figure of speech, deliberately exaggerated by Jesus for effect. The Pharisees would have been too shrewd to go to this limit, although the logic of their system called even for this kind of overt self-praise. Probably Jesus is taking a humorous poke at such hypocrisy in such a way as to get His audience to laugh at this caricature beautifully designed to render unforgettable the serious lesson it taught. **As the hypocrites do.** Jesus spares no words for those who sin by self-glorification, which they try to bring about by feigning unselfishness. While they give the impression that they intend to *give* to the needy, their real motive is to *receive* honor from men's praise. (Cf. Ro. 12:8, "Let him who gives do it with sincerity!") **In the synagogues and streets:** to assure a ready audience. Barnes, *ad loc.*, argues that Jesus could not mean the Jewish meeting place, on the ground that *synagogē* means any meeting place, not just the synagogue, and on the absence of evidence that charity was distributed there. Perhaps so, but no clearer place is indicated, than a place of prayers and Bible study, for the practice of hypocritical giving or praying. After all, he who seeks to be thought pious would surely seek to convince the very elect in the synagogue itself, so as to enjoy their

esteemed favor, would he not? **That they may have glory of men:** Jesus bares their real motive for giving to others. No hypocrite would dare own this purpose as his, for he would immediately lose the praise of others; therefore, this is his ulterior motive. Any difference between one's professed public purpose and his real one indicates the extent to which he is a hypocrite. (Cf. Mt. 15:7, 8; 22:18; 23:5-29) Mixed motives cancel each other out: since one is really serving himself, his religious motive is corrupted; because his religious motive is soiled, he is not really serving his best self! Let the man who would invest his money in the work of the Lord do so with no mental calculation as to what he may realize from it through increased financial gain or personal distinction. But how many respond to an obviously needy person or cause, satisfied that God has seen and this is sufficient? How many would even stop giving if they went unnoticed and others' did not praise? Only merciless self-crucifixion can put to death these selfish desires to be noticed. (Mt. 16:24-27)

They have received their reward. It is not always possible to distinguish in others the difference between courage born of convictions and just plain audacity. The unsuspecting naturally praise those who are unashamed to give public witness of their faith and generosity. But, in the perspective of eternity, what is the value of this ignorant acclaim? On the other hand, perhaps those who praised them saw right through their thin veneer of respectability and gave them equally hypocritical commendation. They got *paid off* in the coin they used. *Receive reward* (*apechô*) is a commercial technical term meaning "to receive a sum in full and give a receipt for it." (Cf. Mk. 14:41; Lk. 6:24; Phil. 4:18; Philm. 15)

6:3 **When thou doest alms.** For the OT viewpoint on almsgiving, look into these passages: Lev. 25:35, 36; Dt. 15:7-11; Job. 29:11-16; Psa. 41:1; Prov. 14:21; 19:17; 21:13; 28:27. *Giving of alms* is but the Greek word for *mercifulness* (*eleêmosunê* from *eleêmôn*, "merciful," from *eleos*, "compassion, pity"). The desire of Christians to help the needy is natural; Jesus assumes that His disciples would do it. But they would need direction on how to go about it. (See notes on 5:42)

Let not thy left hand. Here, by means of a humorous hyperbole, Jesus exaggerates for effect the means to bring secrecy to our giving. He explains His meaning in v. 4. The humor is seen in the question created in the mind of the hearer: "But how could

my left hand be ignorant of the deeds of my right, since neither have minds of their own and both are but instruments of my mind?" But that is just the point: both hands represent the giver and he must so learn to do good to others that it becomes an unconscious life habit with him. If we would free ourselves from being overly conscious of men's praise, rather than invite their attention to what we do, we must not even give our actions the whole of our own attention. Thus, the hands have absolutely nothing to do with our giving, any more than they cause us to sin. (See on Mt. 5:29, 30; Cf. 18:8, 9) The whole matter is settled in the heart. (Cf. "coveting, pride" in Mk. 7:21, 22) Jesus does not intend a mechanical rule for hiding our gifts. Lenski notes (258): "One might hide all his giving in the secret hope of eventually being discovered and then being praised for the saintly secrecy of his gifts!" If men never learn of others' giving, they can hardly praise them, and, as a consequence, these latter are not likely to be disturbed by others' praise that never comes. Jesus wants His disciples to learn to be satisfied with having helped someone, without any ulterior thoughts about their being noticed and admired.

6:4 that thine alms may be in secret. Since the antithesis of Jesus' meaning is ostentatious giving, and not merely public giving, it becomes clear that He does not intend that giving must be absolutely secret to the extent that, should any see the gift, its value as righteousness is automatically compromised. Rather, Jesus intends "secret" in a relative sense: again His point is a question of the right motive. Not all righteous deeds could be concealed. (Ac. 4:36, 37) In fact, He Himself called attention to the unselfishness of the poor widow (Mk. 12:41-44). Paul publicized the liberality of the Macedonian Christians (II Cor. 8:1-5; 9:1-5) to stimulate the giving of the Corinthians. But the Christian is to study ways to avoid display, for it is never necessary to see to it that others see our deeds, even in order to cause them to glorify God. Such deeds cannot long be hid, if they represent really unselfish service for Jesus' sake. (I Tim. 5:24) But there are times when a Christian may rightly excite his slower brethren by his own forthright example of generosity (Heb. 10:24), but he must be careful lest he also stimulate in them a desire for the same public notice he received. (Cf. Ac. 4:32-5:11)

Thy Father seeth in secret. What a man does *in secret* reveals more about him than all his known, public acts could ever tell about him. God knows these secret desires and motives, and judges the man accordingly. (Ro. 2:16; I Cor. 4:5; Heb. 6:10) Ethically it would be nice if man would always just give simply because he has to, i.e. because of his overflowing kindness which allows him to do no other. However, Jesus meets man on a lower level and gives him an ideal that challenges him to rise far above mere overflowing kindness. He grounds His ethic in a much firmer basis: a religious basis: "Give only to be seen by your Father, so that in reality you are serving only Him, seeking only His praise. Maintain this single-mindedness regardless of how many others find out about your generosity." **Your Father shall recompense you.** Happy is the man who has only one judge and seeks only one exceeding great reward. The hypocrite has a thousand judges whom he can never trust to bless him, nor can he ever hope to satisfy their caprice. But a one-judge man can work his way through life, helping people, knowing exactly where he is going and whom he is trying to please. And he is quite happy doing just that. The meager smiles of his contemporaries leave him unmoved, for his eye is fixed on the Father. (Ro. 12:11; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:23-25)

Observe how gently and yet how surely Jesus divides the sheep from the goats: choose this day whom you will serve, decide whose praise you cherish, whose frown and criticism you really fear. Jesus knows that this is the finally decisive index to true discipleship. By promising the recompense of the Father to those who would but seek it, He also disappoints those who are impatient for immediate acclaim. By offering this promise, Jesus leaves open His great invitation to be one of His, and yet He knows that men will reject the high calling of God and choose their own condemnation. (Cf. Heb. 11:26, "(Moses') attention was on the reward.")

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List some of the famous "good deeds" of the Bible that became famous for the simple reason that they who did them either told others about them, or else they did them in the presence, or to the knowledge, of others. Name some of the well-known acts of selfless generosity recorded.
2. What does the answer to the previous question have to do with seeking the proper interpretation of the admonition: "Take heed

that you do not your righteousness before men . . . that your alms be in secret”?

3. What is the meaning of “righteousness” as Jesus uses it in 6:1?
4. Harmonize the two ideas of reward mentioned in 6:1, 2. How is it true that the hypocrites “have received their reward,” when Jesus explicitly warns that hypocrisy brings no reward with the heavenly Father?
5. What is meant by “doing alms”?
6. What is the “reward with your Father”? (6:1) Is this the same as His recompense (6:4)?
7. What is the reward which hypocrites have already received?
8. What is meant by the hyperbole about the left and right hand?
9. What should be the impact upon the hypocrite to whom Jesus indirectly addresses the words, “Thy Father sees in secret”?
10. Show the relationship between the present section (6:1-18) with Jesus’ plan of presentation as this relationship is seen in what has preceded and for what this section prepares. In other words, how does the content of this section fit into the overall outline of Jesus’ argument in the Sermon on the Mount?

D. THE MOTIVES OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 6:1-18)

3. HIS MOTIVE FOR PRAYING TO GOD. (Mt. 6:5-15)

TEXT: 6:5-15

5. And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.
6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.
7. And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
8. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as is heaven, so on earth.
11. Give us this day our daily bread.
12. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil *one*.
14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Examine your own prayer-life to determine whether your prayers are filled with empty forms and repetitions. For whose ears do you pray?
- b. How did Jesus intend this model to be used as a pattern for all prayers? Are these words He uses an outline of ideas to which we may add our personal formulation of the content, or does Jesus intend that we use precisely His words, adding nothing?
- c. If we take Jesus' words as a general model for our own praying, do we follow the emphasis of Jesus, putting the things that are important to God first? Or do we usually lapse into the routine personal requests?
- d. What does it matter if we avoid the hypocritical externalism in the prayers of the Pharisees, or even if we learn the correct wording of the Lord's "model prayer," if we fail to grasp what underlies prayer?
- e. Jesus taught us to pray: "Hallowed be thy name." How does lack of humility in him who prays show that he does not really reverence God's name? How does lack of sincerity profane God's name?
- f. Someone has observed that men probably really pray only a few times in their lives, while the rest of their prayers are mere vain repetitions. Do you agree?
- g. Do you think that it is right for God to recompense (reward, repay) people for praying? (See v. 6) Why do you say this?
- h. Is it possible for a man to be completely sincere in his prayer and yet destroy the very spirit of ideal praying, through his self-centered petitions?

- i. Do you think that it is absolutely necessary to retire to a "closet or inner chamber" for prayer? Why do you say this?
- j. Is this "model prayer" really a model intended for use throughout all time, or intended for use only by Jesus' disciples before the beginning of the Church? Some say no. Do you agree?
- k. How does our concept of God affect our capacity or willingness to "hallow His name"?
- l. Is it always possible to remain unaffected by the fact that others are listening to our prayers offered in their hearing? How would Jesus' admonition about private praying and His condemnation of hypocritical prayers, help us to concentrate properly?
- m. Can you think of occasions when one must necessarily pray to God, when there are others present who have no intention of entering into the spirit of the prayer, an occasion on which one would be compromising or denying his faith, were he not to pray?
- n. If pagan deities are really non-existent and an idol is nothing (Cf. I Cor. 8:4), then why would Gentiles have reason to believe "that they shall be heard . . ." to the point of continuing their prayers for years?
- o. If our "Father knows our needs before we ask him," why pray then?
- p. Is it possible that Jesus intended the phrase "Thy will be done" as an explanation of the petition "Thy kingdom come"? What makes you answer the way you do?
- q. In what sense is it true that our sins may be described as "debts"? To whom would we owe these "debts"? Had we paid them, how would we have done it?
- r. Do you think that forgiving those who sin against us is as important as faith, repentance or baptism? How do you justify your answer? Do you live and teach in harmony with your answer?
- s. You Christians pray, "Bring us not into temptation." But is God so hateful toward His creatures as really to bring any of them into temptation? Is this not a really useless, meaningless petition?

PARAPHRASE

"And when you pray, do not behave like the hypocrites, for they are fond of standing up and praying in the meeting-houses and on the street corners so that everyone will see them. Truly I say to you, they have been paid their wages in full. But you, whenever you pray go into your room, shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. Your Father who sees all secrets will pay you.

"Now when you pray, do not speak without thinking (using meaningless repetitions) as do the pagans to their gods. Their idea is that they will obtain a hearing in accordance with the wordiness of their prayers. Do not imitate them, since God your Father knows your needs even before you ask Him. So pray like this:

'Our heavenly Father, may your Name, Person and character be held in reverence! Your kingdom come: may your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!

'Give us today our daily food. Forgive us what we owe you in the same way as we have forgiven those who owe some obligation to us. Do not bring us into trials which might become temptations to us, but rescue us from the evil one.'

"For if you forgive others their sins against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you too. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your sins against Him!"

SUMMARY

Praying to God while seeking the praise of men brings its own dubious results, but it automatically throws a switch that cuts God completely out of the communication. Hence, God has nothing to do with rewarding such hypocrites. True prayer, offered to the Father alone, must be hidden from men's eyes and praise. Empty repetition is useless, since your Father who is a true and living God needs not to be informed in great detail. Keep your prayer simple like the model given.

NOTES

3. HIS MOTIVE FOR PRAYING TO GOD (6:5-15)

a. He prays only to glorify God, never self.

6:5 **Ye shall not be as the hypocrites.** See on 6:1. Jesus lays another specific charge against the hypocrite: **loving to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners.** Their sin is not in the "standing and praying publicly," but in their "being seen of men and loving it." Standing while praying, as such, is not censured (Cf. Mk. 11:25; Lk. 18:11, 13), but the pride which feeds on praise for piety is condemned. Their choice of such places for prayer was not mere chance in the sense that at the hour of

prayer they happened to find themselves in some public place, but rather they made it their point to be found praying at the prayer hours. They derived particular enjoyment from this habit. (*philousin*) He does not condemn public prayer for the public benefit, in which others participate. Rather He denounces private devotions made public for private benefit. **To be seen of men:** they may have formally addressed their prayers to God, but they really directed them to men. Thus God had nothing to do with either hearing or answering their prayers. This is why the hypocrite has no reward coming from God. (6:1) **To be seen of men** is all the reward they sought and got: **they have received their reward.**

But is there no danger even in leading public prayer during congregational worship? Indeed so, for the one who prays probably will find it no simple matter not to remember the many critical ears listening. It is too easy to desire to be regarded as a highly "spiritual" person, who enjoys exalted communion with God. Perhaps the worst form of pride is the desire to appear humble. One must examine his heart to determine whether his prayer would be simpler and shorter were he praying alone with God and whether the manner or content of his prayer is being affected by those who listen. This must never be construed as forbidding public praying for others as an expression of their common prayer. The Lord's word, applied to this situation not immediately intended by His warning, remains a warning to the individual who is called upon to pray in congregational worship, that he, on behalf of the congregation, place sincere petitions before God.

b. He prays unostentatiously.

6:6 **But thou.** Observe the change from plural to singular, a remarkable change from the preceding lessons addressed to the audience in general. This change of address is reinforced by six second person personal pronouns in this one Greek sentence, as if Jesus were saying, "And now, my disciple, a word to you personally . . ."

(1) The place of prayer: **thine inner chamber.** The "closet" (KJV) is any room that provides a place for private prayer. The use of a room is Jesus' vivid way of rendering concrete some specific place where one can pray undisturbed by others' eyes. (example: II Kg. 4:33) The "chamber" is not absolutely necessary to fulfill Jesus' instruction, since He justified a publican who prayed in the temple with a right heart (Lk. 18:13). The disciples saw and heard

Jesus pray. (Cf. Lk. 3:21; 9:18, 29; 11:1) He encouraged His disciples to unite in prayer, even if just two or three of them so met (Mt. 18:19, 20). He purified the temple to be a "house of prayer for all the nations" (Mk. 11:17). The early Church met together for prayer (Ac. 1:14; 4:23-31; 12:5; 16:25). Many a time Jesus' own "inner chamber" was the solitude of the great out-of-doors. (Mk. 1:35; Lk. 5:16; 6:12) Thus, Jesus means "any place of privacy which permits being alone with God."

(2) The privacy of prayer: **having shut thy door.** This emphasizes the strictness of the solitude, for Jesus is concerned that His follower learn how to isolate his spirit in the midst of the crowd, the hurry, the confusion and lure of the world, and how to talk with God in perfect intimacy. Even those who pray in public must learn to shut out of their mind all awareness of human listeners, at least to the extent that they neither fear their censure nor seek their praise.

(3) The privilege of prayer: **pray to thy Father in secret.** This face-to-face encounter of a conscience with its God is calculated to create a sense of the proper perspective: though He is your Father, yet when you call upon Him, you should expect Him to act like a God, like the Ruler of the universe, who has a mind and a plan of His own. In this solemn, searching situation before one's God, no other considerations must enter in to hinder the transformation of the individual as he seeks God's will. Perhaps there lives a recent convert who does not feel himself ready to address the Father, being afraid he be not ready to commune with such a holy God. But the man who has been a Christian several years and yet cannot pray is a man in danger!

(4) The promise of prayer: **thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.** *Who is in secret* is more than a description of the invisible God. Jesus uses this particular phrase to draw a relation in the mind of the hearer between the invisible God to whom he is to pray and the invisibility of his prayers to the eyes of others. Though no other ever see the fervency of your devotion, and thus can never praise you, yet the Answerer of prayer, who knows your every secret motive and the most inarticulate desire, reads your heart and answers accordingly.

What an incentive to sincerity! Not only does God hear the most secret longings of the heart, uttered when external circumstances make difficult a posture that would indicate to others that

one is praying, but He also sees the divergency between our true desires and our formal prayers. For instance, one may secretly pray that God's will be done in his life concerning a particular temptation, while really wishing that the temptation could be realized. But sincerity before God means that we pray exactly as we really are, always seeking to bring what we really are into line with what we ought to be according to the Father's wishes.

The other side of the question must be stated here for balance. There are occasions when private devotions or prayers must be continued though others may be present and see. If one refuses to pray through fear of men, is this not rather a hypocrisy of the opposite sort? Should one refuse to pray because of the intimidation of others, would it not be an open denial of one's secret faith? (See Daniel 6:10) However, extreme care should be taken to avoid ostentation even here, lest hypocrisy develop. After all, Jesus nowhere specified certain hours or places of prayer. The legalistic Pharisees had done this and had destroyed the spontaneity of true personal religion. Rather, He causes the soul to examine its motives for praying each time, and in this spirit it will make its own times and opportunities for prayer. Thus, man is ever on the testing block to prove his real reasons for desiring to be with God.

- c. He prays properly earnestly concerned about what he says, avoiding thoughtless repetition. (6:7, 8)

6:7 Not as the Gentiles do . . . Be not therefore like unto them. If it be demanded why Jesus chose the *pagans* as a negative point of reference, holding them up for criticism instead of censuring the rambling repetitions of the *Jewish* elders (Barclay, I, 196, notices two pertinent examples), let it be observed that He does this for several reasons:

1. The gods to whom the pagans continuously repeated their cries differ greatly from the God of Israel, "your Father." Heathen deities, being the perverse inventions of human imagination, never answer prayer. Thus, their devotees, duped by their credence in their supposed existence, are forced to beseech these non-entities with a never-ending, useless succession of prayers. (Cf. I Kgs. 18:26; Ac. 19:28, 34)
2. By using *the Gentiles* as an example of what not to do, Jesus brings to the Jewish mind a classic example of the

general principle readily accepted by the Jews: "Now we all admit that the Gentiles heap word upon word to no end, since their gods are quite incapable of hearing or answering their prayers. Therefore, do not act as if your God is no better than theirs." By condemning a major practice, flagrant among the pagans, Jesus touches every like example among the Jews, without ever mentioning them. However, some Jews, repeating their prayers to the true, living God, did so sincerely, quite innocent of the erroneous theological implications of their habit, and they thus could not be entirely blamed for it.

3. The difference in enlightenment between the Gentiles and Jews should be tremendous. **They think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.** This conclusion arises from their constant struggle with non-existent gods, from their seeming successes caused by freaks in nature or else by the generous blessing of the true God, and from the deceptive preachments of *profiteering* oracles and priests. But the Jews had no reason ever to think this, since God had always demonstrated Himself more than ready to answer their prayers. (Cf. Psa. 91:15; Isa. 55:6; 58:9; 65:24; Dan. 9:20-23; 10:12)

Gentiles: see also on 5:47; cf. 5:43 on *enemies*.

6:8 **Your Father knoweth:** this is the key to solution of the whole problem of hypocritical ostentation and pagan repetition, for God knows heart motives as well as **what things ye have need of.** We matter to God! There are times in our life when we despise ourselves because of the painful awareness of our sin and unworthiness. But God's detailed concern about each of our individual needs restores our self-respect. (Phil. 4:6, 7) By saying "*your Father,*" rather than "God," Jesus refers to the Almighty, not merely as Ruler of the Universe, but in the terms of the special relationship with which His child might readily approach Him in confident trust. If Matthew actually wrote "The God who is your Father," as attested by some ancient manuscripts, this effect is heightened, while at the same time throwing into contrast the impersonal, unheeding gods of the Gentiles. That the false gods of the pagans have a definite part of Jesus' contrast is readily seen by seeking the logical subject of the

passive verb "they shall be heard," asking "by whom do the Gentiles think to be heard?" The answer is "by their idol gods."

Your Father knows your needs before you ask him. Why pray then? Would it not be degrading to God, then, if we prayed at all? What if we omitted some detail in our request? Does not this phrase of Jesus reduce prayer either to a futile physical exercise or to an empty psychological auto-suggestion? These problems are born of a failure to apprehend Jesus' antithesis, for His mean is understood when one grasps what He had in mind as the opposite of what He said. The true antithesis is not: "All prayer involves informing a supreme being of one's needs in the hope that it will provide them;" but: "All empty repetition addressed to idols is unavailing." In this light, Jesus means simply, "Your earnest prayers offered to your living, loving heavenly Father produce real results, since He is willing to answer the smallest, sincere prayer. The number of words has nothing to do with its efficacy." Thus, the basis of the objections to prayer is not to be found in Jesus' actual meaning. God does not have to be pestered, coaxed or harangued to make Him give, even though the pagans regard their gods in this way. Our loving Father, unlike heartless idols, is more ready to answer our prayers that we are to pray! (Cf. Lk. 18:1-8)

However, in applying His words, the problem remains: if God knows our needs already, why pray for them?

1. Because He wants to hear from us, because He desires our fellowship and love. This is the most natural relation that could exist between a Father such as He and children such as we. Jesus' constant reference to "your Father" conveys a deeply personal sentiment that elevates the God-to-man relationship from one of Master-to-servant to one of Father-and-son. (Ro 8:31, 32; I Jn. 3:1, 2; and especially in this Sermon on the Mount: Mt. 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 3, 6, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11)

2. Because the Father wants us to acknowledge our dependence upon Him. After all, He still gives and withholds (Jas. 4:2). Presumptuous egotism tends to cause man to become self-sufficient, as if God were not providing every raw material that man himself must utilize. God's position as Father does not automatically obligate Him to shower needed blessings upon self-indulgent children who refuse to crucify their pride and kneel to the Father's will. (Jas. 4:3)

3. Prayer is also necessary because of its psychological reaction in him who prays. It is not a mere psychological consolation by which

the pray-er convinces himself by an auto-suggestion that everything will be all right. Rather, right praying puts us into communion with Him so as to make us ready to receive those choice blessings He intended to give. In this private contact with God we see ourselves and our needs in a different perspective and we become better able to correct our own ignorance of our needs. Right praying is not consciously subjective nor just auto-suggestion, that is, limited to and orientated toward man himself. The psychological factor of prayer lies in man's bringing his will into line with that of the Father by talking intimately with Him about his needs, desires and plans. (Cf. Jas. 4:13-17; I Jn. 3:21, 22; 5:14, 15)

4. We need to pray to express our gratitude for the Father's bountiful provision. (Phil. 4:6)

SOME APPLICATIONS

1. Prayers must never become a babbled formula in which the mind does not participate. The way our thoughts wander from our talk with God must be recognized for the lack of reverence it is for Him whose audience we have requested. This involves our learning to concentrate our complete attention upon the Father alone. But the same prayer-routine of requests each day becomes just as surely a string of beads as any pagan repetitiousness. Any such mechanized attempt to gain God's favor must necessarily be doubly dangerous: it fails of its object and it deceives the one who so prays by causing him to suppose he is really using the right means of communicating with his God, when in reality he is merely repeating words. One saving discipline would be the constant effort each day to concentrate upon expressing one's daily requests in more personal, fresh language, since stereotyped terminology tends to remove prayer from the realm of sincerity and vitality.

2. Beware of prayers that become associated with certain occasions. Surely every happening in life should be brought into the presence of God, but care should be taken lest the tendency develop to revert to the same prayer for the same occasions. Examples are numberless: thinksgiving at meals, praying at the Lord's table, benedictions, "pastoral prayers," etc.

3. Systematic praying is not an unmixed blessing. It could be a blessing if it helps those, who are careless in their prayer habits, to develop a closer, more regular walk with God. But a system can become a curse when it devolves into a thoughtless ritual to be

completed. But prayer is not a gadget, nor is pure praying in the process itself, i.e. in the mere counting of words or minutes. We must not become so engrossed in the action of praying that our purposes and motives be forgotten. There is no merit in setting 20 minutes a day to pray for 20 minutes, any more than a 50-word prayer is of more virtue than a 250-word sample. God looks at the heart, not the clock!

4. But heart-felt petitions, earnestly repeated, are not necessarily wrong, even though some people do become intoxicated with words endlessly repeated as a substitution for prayer. (Cf. the Romanists' paternosters and avemarias.) Yet, in offering some petitions, we are taught to be persistent in seeking the Father's will. (Lk. 18:1ff) Sometimes the only difference between such persistent praying and mere empty repetition is the condition of the heart: the words may even be the same. Thus, two keys to a right heart are undivided attention fixed upon the Father, and earnestness of purpose. These are vastly more important than choice language or correct posture. Notice that Jesus prayed the same basic prayer three times in the garden. (Mt. 26:39, 42, 44) Paul also besought the Lord thrice. (II Cor. 12:8)

d. The Lord's model prayer. (6:9-15)

- (1) The wise and godly man approaches God as Father, whose Name he really hallows. (6:9)

6:9 **After this manner therefore pray ye.** How are we to do this? As a form in itself, the prayer may be used as it is. (Cf. Lk. 11:2, "When you pray, say . . .") Certainly, Jesus did not intend only a verbal repetition of this prayer, since Luke (11:2-4) gives it another form by omitting words and phrases reported here. Again, neither Jesus nor His disciples are ever reported to have prayed this form, although they prayed often. (Cf. Mt. 11:25, 26; 26:36-44; Jn. 17; Ac. 1:24, 25; 4:23-31) He intends this prayer to be a format, an example of correct prayer, to function as a model or an outline upon which we may build our own supplications. One important element omitted from Jesus' model, that He added later when His disciples were more prepared to receive it, was the signature, "in my name." (See Jn. 16:23-27; 14:13; Mt. 18:19, 20; Col. 3:17) Until His disciples grasped something of His nature, He did not include this feature. However, this is not to say that He could not

have included it, for He could have done so with the specific purpose of teaching them who He was and in what new relation they were to stand before God through Him.

Since unaided man hardly knows how to approach God (cf. Ro. 8:26), it is vital that Jesus reveal a list of the most important matters which every prayer should touch. Thus, the extent to which our prayers deal with (in one way or another) the significant issues that Jesus included in this model reveals the degree of seriousness we attach to our Lord's wisdom in exhorting us to "pray after this manner."

Pray ye. But what individuals or group constitute this "ye"? Jewish contemporaries of Jesus? only His disciples of every age? Yes, both, because the conscientious praying of this prayer cannot help but bring the farthest outsider into the kingdom, since the implications of its phraseology covers a multitude of requirements. Who could ever really pray, "Thy will be done," without offering willing submission to all that God has revealed of His will?

Our Father who art in heaven. What dynamic propositions are included in these simple words of address?

1. **Our God is *Father*.** This truth settles our relation to the unseen world: we need not fear a host of unknown forces "out there," since we abide in our Father's love. He is not merely Ruler of the universe, but *Father*, not just a Father as conceived by just any religious orientation, but "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," as He revealed Himself historically and personally in Jesus. (Cf. Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:13; 5:17, 18; 12:49, 50; 14:6, 7; 17:3; Mt. 11:27) The idea of God as "Father" is hardly an OT concept, although some passages suggest it. (Cf. Dt. 32:6; Psa. 103:13; 68:5; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; 2:10) It took Jesus to reveal Him as Father. Therefore, He is Father in a special sense to those who accept Jesus' revelation. (Jn. 1:9-13; I Jn. 1:3; 2:22, 23; Eph. 1:5)

2. **He is *our Father*:** this speaks of our relation to others who are His children. We share this glorious relationship: God is no man's exclusive possession. Selfishness is eliminated at the outset. Even in the most sublime moment of exalted conversation with the Father, our mind must be alive to the uncounted hosts who, with us, call upon the Father. All of the personal petitions (6:11-13) maintain this altruistic motif. (Study the content of Paul's prayers, to see how his concentration upon God brought to mind all the

other Christians: Ro. 1:7-10; I Cor. 1:3-9; Eph. 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-14; I Th. 1:2ff; II Th. 1:11; Philemon 4-6) Note that though Jesus teaches us to pray "Our Father," He Himself never so addressed God in His prayers. Usually He says, "My Father . . ." His unique deity stands out even in His prayers.

3. He is our *Father in heaven*. This majestic description of His palace reminds us of the scope of His existence and His infinite elevation above us. (Cf. I Kg. 8:27; Isa. 66:1, 2a; Jer. 23:24; Heb. 12:25) Not only has He set His dwelling in the heavens where He rules (Psa. 11:4; 103:19), not only has He established there His throne of grace (cf. Heb. 4:14-16; 7:26; 8:1), but there He would have us place all our desires, hopes and dreams (Mt. 6:20; Psa. 73:25; Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:5; I Pet. 1:4). But can we truly address His as "Father in heaven," when we really seek only earthly ends? (Cf. Lk. 17:32 in context) This strikes an immediate contrast between this heavenly God and all the gods of the earth who must dwell in temples made by human device and whose subjects are their human inventors.

4. He is our Father **whose name must be hallowed**. This indicates the character of our relationship to Him. This great God, who would have us call Him "Father," is still God whom we must approach with awe, wonder, reverence and devotion! "Father" must never be cheapened to an easy sentimentalism or a crude vulgarity. (Cf. Notes on 5:33-37) What a sharp rebuke is this both of common blasphemy and of the refined hypocrisy of those who utter God's Name in prayers addressed to the ears of men! It cuts deep into blind partisan zeal and outward wickedness that would hide behind God's Name, as if it somehow justified all practices done in its shadow. (Cf. Isa. 52:5; Ezek. 36:18-23; Ro. 2:24; I Tim. 6:1; Tit. 2:5; II Pet. 2:2)

Even a cursory reading of the OT usage of "the Name of God" reveals that "the Name" does not mean simply that word by which He is called, such as "Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, Jehovah, El Roi," or some other distinguishing title. (Cf. Psa. 48:10; 33:21; 61:5; 111:9) Technically, this figure of speech is a metonymy of the adjunct, i.e. the name of something is mentioned instead of the thing itself. So, "Hallowed be thy Name" means "Hallowed be Thou thyself." Just as no name has reality by itself, but is only real or has meaning as it reveals, describes or indicates that for which it stands, so God's Names have meaning only as they reveal different

aspects of God Himself. His Name emphasizes His nature, character and personality as He reveals Himself to man. His Name draws attention to His glorious attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence as well as His matchless moral character of holiness, love, justice and mercy. And Jesus is at the heart of everything that God's Name reveals. (Cf. Jn. 10:30; 14:9; 17:6, 11, 12, 26) Therefore, Jesus is not asking us to hold in superficial regard certain words which refer to the Deity; far from it! Our prayer must be, "May I do what is in my feeble power to accord your nature and character, as represented by your Name, that unique, honored place which You deserve."

How may we "hallow, treat as holy, or reverence" God's Name? By simply doing all that is involved in worshipping God: serving Him. Jesus forbids the irreverence of a disobedient life. (Lk. 6:46) We must live up to the dignity of so noble a relation as that with our Holy Father. We hallow His Name by giving thanks at every remembrance of His goodness, by our utter humility, and, most of all, by our submission to His will. Meditate upon Jn. 12:27, 28 in the context of Jesus' sermon "Dying to Live," and glory in the Lord's own example of upholding God's will even in the face of certain personal suffering. (Cf. Peter's exhortation I Pet. 3:15)

Note how perfectly connected is every part of the prayer: before we are capable of reverencing His Name, we must know and confess what sort of God He is. We would feel little reverence for a deistic god who winds up the universe like a giant clock, flings it out into space to run down, and turns his back upon our problems because he is not interested in us. Nor could anyone take the pagan gods very seriously, with their all-too-human vices. But our God, as we know Him through His Word, is the perfect balance of wisdom, power, righteousness and love. He is not unwilling to hear so that He must be cajoled into listening, nor is He ignorant of our needs. This kind of God shows Himself worthy of all our adoration, our reverence, our service.

(2) The wise and godly man seeks first God's kingdom and His righteousness by submitting himself to God's will. (6:10)

6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. The word "kingdom" to Jesus' Jewish audience would immediately call up in their minds visions of the great messianic rule of the Son of David (Mk. 11:10; Lk. 14:15; 17:20, 21; 19:11;

Ac. 1:6). However mistaken may have been their concepts regarding the kingdom, yet Jesus DID come to establish God's kingdom. (Mt. 4:23; 10:7; 11:11-13; 16:18, 19, 28; 21:31, 32; 26:29) Historically, the kingdom was concretely realized when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles on Pentecost, thus empowering them to open the doors of the kingdom to "as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him." (Acts 2; 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23; I Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:13; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) Thus, some would object to praying this petition on the ground that the Church, the most obviously visible and practical evidence of God's reign upon earth, has already come. But it is significant that Jesus did not say, "Thy Church come," for the Church and Kingdom are not necessarily co-extensive. One may be part of the Church and yet not be fully part of God's Kingdom. (Ac. 14:22; I Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; I Th. 2:12; II Th. 1:5; II Tim. 4:18; Jas. 2:5; II Pet. 1:11) Therefore, if the "kingdom" be defined as "the perfect submission of the will of man to the reign of God," then there is no time at which this phrase is outdated. Indeed, we may pray for the consummation of all things in God's glorious rule (I Cor. 15:24-28). Artificial and exclusive distinctions that force the "kingdom of God" into a dispensational or a millennial framework are false at worst, and at their best are inadequate whereinssofar true. There will always remain a sense in which God's rule is not completely acknowledged by even the best of Christians. It is unfortunate that this should be so, but it will probably remain so until the judgment. Any admission of imperfection or failure to love is an index of the extent to which God's kingdom has not come in one's heart, an indication of the point at which God's will is not being done by the Christian as he knows it is being done in God's heaven. (Cf. Ro. 14:17)

Thy will be done. This formulates the best definition of God's kingdom ever expressed in the life of the individual, in the government of the universe, in God's moral victory at the consummation of the ages. In these simple words rests the simplest statement of man's deepest commitment, his most far-reaching confession and his most satisfying decision. Each time man prays this way, he alligns himself with the ultimate Creator and Governor of stars and sparrows, of men and morals! There exists no greater religion than to pray these words sincerely and to walk consistently in the light of their implications. What are some of these implications?

1. *As in heaven so on earth.* The manner matters; the example is clear. God's celestial servants render Him constant, prompt, humble and cheerful service. (Cf. Psa. 103:10-22; Isa. 6:1-8; Dan. 7:10; Heb. 1:14) Doing God's will is not a matter of perfect obedience when we are finally ushered into His presence at the end of time, but a practical putting into effect His slightest wish *on earth* right now!
2. Thy REVEALED will be done. God has expressed that part of His total purpose which He expects us to get done. (Heb. 1:1, 2; 2:1-4; Mt. 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 26:42; Jn. 6:29, 39, 40; Ro. 12:2; Eph. 1:3-14; 5:17; 6:6; I Th. 4:3; 5:18; I Tim. 2:1-4; Heb. 10:36; 13:21; Jas. 1:18; I Pet. 2:15; 4:2) Can we really pray "thy will be done," if we question His wisdom, deny His right to our obedience or resent any of His commands? Further, can we pray thus, if we have made little or no effort to search His Word for every indication of His will as it touches every phase of our life? In this petition we pledge ourselves to do things God's way whereinsofar He has actually revealed His will, and we pledge our opposition to all that opposes Him. (Cf. Ro. 8:5-17; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-24, 27; 5:1-20; Jas. 4:4; Ro. 1:18-32) But even our opposition must be accomplished in conformity with God's plans for our dealing with His enemies and opposition.
3. Thy UNREVEALED will be done. The Father has wisely not told man everything that is part of His will for the universe. God's unrevealed will for our lives may be seen in certain events, joyous or calamitous, which the disciple accepts. (Study Ac. 21:1-14; Ro. 15:32; I Cor. 4:19; Jas. 4:15; I Jn. 5:14) If we have placed our lives wholly under our Father's control, we may accept without murmur, hesitation or doubt whatever He chooses to send, whether suffering, trials or crosses. This decision is already made when one submits himself to the will of God, and is maintained by continued commitments as each situation arises. This is not a tone of defeated resignation or of bitter resentment because of the irresistibility of God's judgments, but the willing, glad choice that is sure of God's wisdom and love.

If, then, seeking first the progress of God's kingdom means willing, active, personal obedience to His will, then let us do the little everyday duties here and now with all deliberate vigor, so as to fulfill our part in promoting His reign on earth! God has revealed enough in His written Word to keep us so busy doing the things that really matter that we shall have little time to worry about the unknown facets of His will of which He has not informed us.

(3) The wise and godly man acknowledges God as the Giver of all

6:11 **Give us this day our daily bread.** This petition begins a series of three petitions for self, but, observe, they follow those which glorify God and put man in his right place before God. The man, thus orientated toward God and consumed with a real passion for His kingdom, turns to three personal needs: food, forgiveness and fortification.

Our daily bread. Matthew and Luke (11:3) use one of those rare words in Greek that is so rare it has been found only once elsewhere in the history of the Greek language: *epiousios*, usually translated "daily." Since word meaning is discoverable from the many examples of the way people use the word, *epiousios* is almost incapable of translation. Barclay (I, 217) states that that other occurrence of the word was on a woman's shopping list which contained an item beside which this word had been written. He assumes that the word means "for the coming day," that is, as we arise in the morning we pray, "Give us today the bread for this day which lies before us." Others, deriving the Greek word from various roots, construe it to mean: "necessary for existence," or "for the following day," or "bread for the future," or "bread that comes to the day, that belongs to it," or "bread for the next day." Whatever the actual meaning of the word, the best explanation must take into account the accompanying words of our authors who say, "Give us *today* (Matthew) and everyday *day by day* (Luke: *to kath hēmeran*, cf. Lk. 19:47; Ac. 17:11)." These words would lead one to conclude that the word *epiousios* does not refer to time at all, since that element is specifically mentioned in other words. Further, the word must modify "bread" in some way. If so, it may mean, "Give us that food portion *which is coming to us*," that is, we are asking for that ration which God apportioned to our need even before we pray. (Cf. Mt. 6:8, 32; Prov. 30:8)

Jesus is trying to teach us total dependence upon God. What a supreme introduction this petition is to the section which develops it! (6:19-34)

1. Ours is a NECESSARY dependence upon God for anything that sustains life, for "bread" does not mean just so much wheat baked and cut a certain way. (Psa. 37:3, 4, 25; Ac. 17:25-28) And since our dependence is necessary, we must neither presume upon nor despair of God's provision. (Mt. 4:3, 4, see Notes)
2. Ours is a DAILY dependence upon God: "today," "day by day." As long as it is called "today," we do not need tomorrow's bread (Mt. 6:34; Psa. 127:2). This kind of trust cancels that anxious worry about the distant and unknown future which is so characteristic of the life that has not learned to depend upon the Father. As a matter of fact, we are given only one day at a time with which to live anyway: every morning of the world is always another "today," never a feared tomorrow. We must live one day at a time, confident of the Father's provision. The Jews had to learn this (Ex. 16:1-21) and so must we (Jas. 4:13-16). But this dependence does not dispense with our daily work for today's bread (Eph. 4:28; I Th. 4:11, 12; 5:14; II Th. 3:6-13; I Tim. 5:8) Rather, it is an acknowledgement of God's power working in us to earn that which He provides (Cf. Gen. 3:19; Dt. 8:1-20, esp. v. 18) Each day we must work as well as pray for food, since without God we can do nothing and without our effort and collaboration God will do nothing for us.
3. Ours is a HUMBLE dependence upon God. It is for "bread" that we ask, not luxuries. What a rebuke is this of our constant struggle and straining after more and more of this world's "good things of life"! Since all we have has been given to us, our pride and selfishness are thereby rebuked. Too often we claim to be "rich, increased in goods and have need of nothing," when in reality we have to knock at the Father's door for even a crust of bread. We are debtors to God for every bit of sunshine or rain, every mineral and every faithful farmer that has been given to provide us our bread; otherwise we would have starved.

Quite naturally, the psychological result of sincerely praying this way is deep contentment and freedom from worries and freedom to spend the rest of our God-given time and energies in useful endeavor. (Phil. 4:6, 7, 11-13, 19)

- (4) The wise and godly man seeks forgiveness in relation to his own mercifulness. (6:12)

6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Having asked God to provide food that we might live, we immediately confess that we have no right to live. By asking His forgiveness for not having lived perfectly, we admit that it is only by His grace that we could even hope to live. But before we are able sincerely to beseech God's forgiveness, we must honestly face the fact that we need to pray for it. If we view our sins as only a disease, only a human weakness, merely a social embarrassment, or an impersonal moral deterioration in the race, then we need not bother God with prayers like this. But we must see sin in its true light as rebellion against God's government, a factual disobedience of His law, an insult to His character and a rupture of our relations with the Father. (See notes on 5:48)

Our debts is a figurative phrase meaning "sins" (Cf. Lk. 11:4), especially those sins of omission. When some deed of love is left undone, that failure is sin and becomes something owed but not paid. (Cf. Jas. 4:17; Lk. 12:47)

As we have forgiven. How about our prayers? Are we always sincere when we say these words? Would we really want God to use this measure on us? Have we really forgiven even if the offence has been committed 70 times seven? (Cf. Mt. 18:22) One must be fully aware of what he is doing when he utters this frightening petition, for it is quite clear that if one prays it with some unsettled quarrel or some unhealing grudge or animosity, he is asking God NOT to forgive him! (Cf. 5:21-26)

Our forgiving others is not a meritorious act in itself which somehow obligates God to forgive, without regard to other factors, just anyone who chooses to forgive an offence. Only Christ's death can be the ground for our being pardoned. (Ac. 4:12; Ro. 3:22-26; 5:6-11; Heb. 9:14, 22, 26-28; 10:10, 12, 14) But our forgiving others IS a condition or necessary qualification our position under God's grace. So long as we harbor implacable resentment toward others,

it is presumptuous to hope for His mercy for ourselves. (See vv. 14, 15) Why must we be merciful? (5:7)

1. Because forgiveness is a quality which demands of us that moral disposition seen in the Father when He forgives us. By exercising mercifulness, we grow to be more and more like the Father (Lk. 6:36).
2. Because there is no virtue more becoming those of our sinful condition: we need mercy! (Cf. Mt. 18:21-35)
3. Because mercy and forgiveness bring with them humility, self-denial, love and peace-making.

Jesus offers a simple safeguard against our overevaluation of men's praise. If we remember that they are sinners in need of God's mercy as well as our forgiveness, this fact greatly reduces the value of their praise in our own eyes. What difference does it make to a condemned man whether his fellow criminals think highly of him or not?

Our debtors. Jesus' words *debts* and *debtors*, as indicated before, refer principally to *sins*; hence, they do not require that all financial arrangements to pay be merely forgotten or forgiven. Otherwise, normal business relations could not exist without some type of credit system. However, if circumstances render a debtor incapable of paying, the disciple may feel compelled to forgive and forget even that financial debt. However, Jesus' word covers all manner of social debts. (See on 5:23-26) The principle is clear: our debtors must be forgiven before we can pray aright. While it might be true that we hesitate to forgive them at the moment they sinned against us, yet we will have to have already forgiven them before we may seek our own forgiveness from God. Even though we yet call them "our debtors" in the prayer, it is obvious that we no longer really think of them as such, since we have released them of that obligation.

- (5) The wise and godly man confesses his own vulnerability to temptation and his need for God's help. (6:13)

6:13 And bring us not into temptation. But, is God so wicked as to expose any one of His creatures to temptation? But so to ask is to formulate the wrong question, since we are not to blame God for our temptations (Jas. 1:13), because He is not the real source of our temptations (Jas. 1:14, 15). How shall this dilemma be solved?

The first part of the answer is found in the meaning of the word usually translated "temptation" (*peirasmos*) or "to tempt" (*peirazein*). Their primary meaning is "to put to a test, to test, to prove; hence, any such trial or test that reveals the quality of the thing tested." By extension of meaning, these words take on the additional significance: "to test with a view to discover one's weakness in order to cause him thereby to sin." Thus, the same word (*peirasmos*) may be taken either as an examination of quality or else as a deliberate attempt to trick into sin. Unfortunately, even the same situation in our lives possesses both of these qualities. How do we tell the difference? The difference between a "temptation to sin" and a "test of character" lies in the viewpoint from which it is considered.

1. GOD'S VIEWPOINT:

- a. God never tempts anyone to sin. (Jas. 1:13) Therefore, from His standpoint, that in which we are praying not to be led certainly is not temptation.
 - b. God does put men to tests that try their strength, loyalty and their ability for further service. (Cf. Gen. 22:1-19; Ex. 20:20; Dt. 8:1-3, 16; 13:3; Jdg. 2:22; 3:1; Mt. 4:1) He also helps them to overcome the tests and emerge as stronger, finer men. (I Cor. 10:13; Heb. 2:18; 4:15; II Pet. 2:9) Any of His tests, whatever its particular nature, is designed by God to produce His character in us. (Heb. 12:1-11)
 - c. Although God does permit Satan to tempt us, these temptations are, as far as He is concerned, tests of our loyalty to Him. As God views them, Satan's temptations are but another form of useful testing the nature of our steadfastness and another means of producing an even more durable character in us, ever more capable of resisting temptations. (Cf. Job; Heb. 11:37)
 - d. God does not test us by misrepresenting the case, as does Satan. Nor does God bait us to do evil. But He does force us to make the moral choice involved in any trial. God's purpose is to make us decide, causing us to grow.
2. SATAN'S VIEWPOINT: It seems that Satan's purpose is always to destroy us by tricking us into sinning. (Cf. Mt. 4; Lk. 4; Ac. 5:3; 26:18; I Cor. 7:5; 10:12, 13; II Cor. 2:11; 4:4;

11:13-15; 12:7; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; I Th. 3:5; II Th. 2:9-12; I Jn. 4:4; 5:19; Rev. 12:9) He misrepresents and deceives us by making wrong appear to be right and quite justifiable, while he makes right and good to appear unnecessary, fanatical or even wrong. (Cf. Mt. 13:22; Ro. 16:18; I Cor. 3:18; 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:1, 3, 7; Eph. 4:14; II Th. 2:3; I Tim. 6:9; II Tim. 3:13; Tit. 3:3; Heb. 3:13; Jas. 1:22; I Jn. 1:8; 3:7; II Jn. 7) These passages also note some of Satan's secondary lines of approach.

3. OUR VIEWPOINT:

- a. We may rejoice in those trials which assail us, knowing that they help to produce in us steadfastness and perfection of character. (Ro. 5:3, 4; Jas. 1:2-4; I Pet. 1:6-9)
- b. Yet, we must not desire to be tempted, for only fools rush into temptations where the Son of God says it is dangerous to tread! Jesus knew the power of the Evil One, and here He warns against a foolish seeking to be tempted. This phrase, "bring us not into temptation, but deliver us," rises right out of His wilderness experience. It is a cry that is real and pleading.
- c. **Deliver us from the evil one:** fearing Satan's influence and our own ruin, we pray to be delivered from him. He is quite capable of twisting any of God's tests into a temptation that would destroy us, if we would but yield.
- d. Knowing our own natural weaknesses (Jas. 1:14, 15), we ask God not to lead us into these trials of flesh and spirit. Though it be natural that we cringe from the fires of testing, yet we admit, by saying "Deliver us . . .," that God will certainly thus refine our souls.

So, our prayer not to be led "into temptation" must mean: "Do not bring us into those crises of soul that, in view of our weakness and Satan's deceit, could become for us temptations."

Another interpretation, which arrives at the same conclusion, regards Jesus' word "temptation" as an example of the figure of speech, *synecdoche*, by which a part is put for the whole or vice versa. Therefore, Jesus mentions *temptation*, which is but a specific

part of all those trials which put the conscience into crisis. Or, if Jesus means *temptation* as a metonymy, a figure by which the name of one thing is exchanged for that of another because of some relationship between them, then, since all trials could become temptations to sin or could contain enticements, the Lord is indicating the most dangerous side of our trials. However, He cannot be construed as meaning that God is the Author of the temptations themselves.

Finally, Jesus may not have even meant "temptation" by that neutral word that He actually used (*peirasmos*). Instead, if we follow the primary meaning, we understand Him to mean, "Do not bring us into trials or tests," in the same sense in which He pleaded with the Father to let that bitter cup of suffering pass from Him, fully knowing that it was to that very end for which He had come into the world. (Cf. Mt. 26:39, 42, 44 with 20:28) Some might object that this would be praying a prayer about which we knew there was little prospect of its being answered according to our intent. Yet, who knows the mind of God or what He would do in our behalf beyond what He has already promised? However, as in the Gethsemane prayers so also in our petitions, there must be a humbly submissive "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Cf. v. 10) This is tacitly admitted between the yearning of the soul to avoid hard trials, and his entreaty to be delivered from the devil who most certainly hurls his awful attacks during these trials that one knows must surely come.

Praying this prayer, we admit our vulnerability to temptation. But we also admit the weaknesses of others: "Lead us . . . deliver us." Thus, when we pray, we are agreeing not to be the stumbling-block in the way of others nor be their devil. (Cf. Mt. 16:23; 18:1-14; Ro. 14:1-15:1; I Cor. 6:12-20; 8; 10:23-33) Further, we agree not to become our devil by deliberately throwing ourselves into the path of temptation. (Cf. Mt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38; Lk. 22:40, 46) Unfortunately, most of us keep one eye open to the temptation we pray not to be led into. Thus, even the devil cannot be blamed for our yielding. Therefore, if we would cooperate with God as He rescues us from danger, we must make use of those means which He has provided. (I Cor. 10:13) The only sure protection against the confusion and deception involved in most trials is to live so constantly with the truth that the false or twisted values or reversed judgments be immediately exposed for what they are. God has already provided the surest protection in the truth of His word.

(II Pet. 1:3, 4; cf. Mt. 4:1-11 and Jesus' use of that Word) Observe the close relationship between being sanctified in the Word and being guarded from the wicked one (Jn. 17:6-19). This disciple's prayer, a cry of weakness, leans upon God, the Master of all circumstances who can do something about them (II Pet. 2:9), fully assured of His strength that perfects itself in our weakness. (Cf. II Cor. 11:30; 12:9, 10; II Tim. 3:3; I Jn. 5:18)

DOXOLOGY: *For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.* These beautiful words provide a fitting closing to this prayer, but the earliest evidence for the use of these words in connection with the prayer is around 130 A.D., in the *Didache*. There is no clear evidence that either Matthew or Luke wrote these words. Rather, the proof is clearer that the early Church adapted this prayer for congregational worship by adding the popular doxology as a conclusion. Thence it found its way into some early manuscripts and was handed down with the prayer, until discovered and removed.

6:14, 15 See Notes on 5:7 and 6:12. We must substitute our failure to forgive with real forgiveness of failures if we expect the Father to show us mercy. (Mt. 18:35; Mk. 11:25; Psa. 18:25, 26) Thus, God's forgiveness puts us under heavy obligation (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). For excellent examples of human forgiveness, study *Joseph* (Gen. 45:1-15; 50:17-21); *David's* kind of forgiveness as he ran from Saul: he just kept running and kept forgiving (I Sam. 24; 26); *Paul*, having been so maltreated by the Jews, yet could not keep from praying for their salvation. (Cf. Ac. 14:19; 17:1-13; 21:27—23:22 with Ro. 9:1-3; 10:1-3)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain "thy kingdom come." What is meant by "the kingdom" in this petition? In what sense may this petition be intended, for instance, by the Jewish disciples of Jesus, who first heard Him? by a Christian?
2. List the elements of the Lord's Prayer which should be included in our prayers.
3. List some of the great public prayers of the Bible, in which men did not "go into their closet, shut the door and pray to the Father in secret."

4. List as many prayers of the Bible as you can, in which the same basic petition is repeated two or three times or more, and yet it is obvious from the context of these prayers that they were heard of God and were not "vain repetition."
5. What is the "closet" (KJV) or "inner chamber"? Show how Jesus intended this word, by citing examples from His prayer life and that of the apostles who applied this teaching.
6. What kind of repetition in praying did Jesus mean to condemn?
7. What is meant by "hallowed"?
8. Explain how God's Name is to be hallowed.
9. What is meant by God's "Name"? Is this to be taken literally, or as a figure of speech? If a figure, what figure would it be, and what is the reality for which the supposed figure stands?
10. In what sense is it true that God "is in secret"? (6:6)
11. Why did Jesus criticize the vain repetitions of the *Gentiles*? List several reasons why Jesus would not necessarily have mentioned the repetitiousness of the Jews in this particular argument.
12. What is the antithesis of Jesus' words "Your Father knows your needs before you ask Him"? How does a correct recognition of this antithesis help to understand what He means by these words?
13. What other elements, plainly indicated in other passages, should form part of our prayers, although they have not been listed in the petitions of the Lord's model?
14. Is the concept of God as "Father" an Old Testament concept? That is, is the evidence plentiful or scarce that the Jews readily thought of God as their "Father"? What difference would this make in view of Jesus' revelation of God?
15. What is meant by "will" in the phrase: "Thy *will* be done"? What does this *will* include? Can men know this will? Has God revealed any of it? How or where?
16. What is admitted as true by the phrase: "as in heaven"?
17. Mentally divide the "Lord's Prayer" into six basic petitions. What single idea characterizes the first three requests? the last three?
18. What lessons does Jesus want us to learn by praying for our bread each day?
19. How does Luke's version of this prayer help us to understand Jesus' intent behind the words "debts" and "debtors"? Must we dissolve all our financial arrangements by which others owe us money, before we may pray for God's forgiveness? Who are our "debtors"?

20. What does Jesus mean by the word "temptation"? Literally or figuratively? If figuratively, what figure of speech is it? What other translations are possible for Jesus' original word?
21. What is the earliest evidence for the popular doxology that is often added to the model Jesus gave, to give it a fitting conclusion?

D. THE MOTIVES OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 6:1-18)

4. HIS MOTIVATION FOR FASTING. (Mt. 6:16-18)

TEXT: 6:16-18

16. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward.
17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face;
18. that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father who is in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall recompense thee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Have you ever fasted? Why did you fast, if so?
- b. Do you think fasting is a principle or is it a practice which represents a principle? Or, to put it another way, can one fast in another way that represents and abstinence from some habit, other than from food?
- c. Of what positive benefit is fasting, if he who fasts does not understand the relationship in which his body, with all its desires, stands to God? In other words, does fasting, by itself without that understanding, carry with it special spiritual benefits?
- d. If it be true that ascetic practices in general tend to "promote rigor of devotion, self-abasement and severity to the body, but are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh," (Col. 2:23) of what value then is fasting, a practice which may be considered to be ascetic?
- e. Do you think Jesus intended this directive concerning fasting for His Jewish disciples only, giving them instructions for its correct observance for that era, or is this directive a universal command intended for any era and any disciple? On what basis does one decide this?

PARAPHRASE

"So also when you abstain from the usual comforts of life for religious reasons, do not look all sad and gloomy, like the hypocrites. They disfigure their faces in order to present to others the figure of one who fasts. Believe me, they have received all the wages they are going to get. But when you fast, do whatever is necessary for good grooming: for example, anoint your head and wash your face. Do this so that no one will know that you are fasting, so that only your Father who is invisible may know it. Then your Father who sees what is secret will give you what is right."

SUMMARY

Fasting, like giving alms or praying, to have value before God must actually represent the heart attitude of the one who so expresses himself. If fasting is to represent the affliction of one's soul, it must be done before God, hence, secretly, lest men see and praise. Consequently, those whose fasting is deliberately aimed at public attention and personal self-exaltation have vitiated it into a tragicomic clown's act.

NOTES

4. HIS MOTIVATION FOR FASTING: He humbles himself before God, not to gain men's applause. (6:16-18)

6:16 **To fast.** The Law of Moses never prescribed fasting directly. Only in connection with the Day of Atonement was a command given "to afflict your souls" (Lev. 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7). This order to "humble, or bow, the soul," by restraining the earthly appetites, was interpreted to mean fasting (Cf. Ac. 27:9), although the word actually meaning "to go without food and drink" (*isum*) came into use first of all in the time of the Judges. (Keil-Delitzsch, *Penteteuch*, II, 405, 406; cf. Judg. 20:26; I Sam. 7:6; Psa. 35:13. This latter passage shows the distinction in translation: "I afflicted my soul with fasting.") Thus, only this one day of the year was legally set aside for appropriate observance in a right state of mind brought about by such abstinence. Nevertheless, the Jewish tradition had set as fast days also Monday and Thursday of every week. (Cf. Lk. 18:12; 5:33)

The professed purposes of fasting are wrapped up in the desire to express one's sincerity by this departure from the normal pattern of living. Devout men of all ages have fasted when they found themselves in trouble or in danger or to guarantee the sincerity of their penitence and prayers. Other times they fasted to humble the spirit and obtain the victory over selfishness, pride and desire. Again, fasting is a natural expression of mourning or an attempt to expiate some sin or an expression of penitence or even a preparation to receive revelations. (Examples: Dt. 9:9; Jdg. 20:26; I Sam. 1:7; 7:6; 31:13; II Sam. 1:12; 3:35; 12:16; I Kg. 19:8; 21:4, 27; II Chron. 20:3, 4; Ezra 8:21; 9:3, 5; Neh. 1:4; 2:2; 9:1; Esther 4:16; Dan. 9:3; 10:2, 3; Jonah 3:5-10; Joel 1:13, 14; 2:15, 16; Zech. 8:18, 19; Mt. 9:14; Lk. 2:37; Ac. 13:3; 14:23)

Since fasting is a natural expression, it cannot be regulated arbitrarily, since it is what every person in the need or mood for it does naturally. At such times when the soul is so oppressed by the burden of sin, so stricken with grief, so apprehensive of impending trouble, so awe-inspired by the solemnity of a particular occasion, going without the usual sustenance becomes a natural reaction of the spirit. Such fasting is acceptable because it is a real expression of the man. Clearly, then, the frequency or duration of a fast must be determined by one's personal constitution, need, regular activity and similar factors.

However, the Pharisees had wrung all of the beneficial content from the form of fasting. It is easy to see how what had been regarded as a guarantee of the sincerity of one's repentance should become the substitute for it. Thus, they used fasting as a means of appearing righteous, rather than a means to get right with God. They made it feed their pride until it became a meritorious lever to tip the balance of God's favor in their direction, thus giving them a false sense of control over God. Instead of humbling their spirits to faithful obedience to God's commands, they prided themselves in fasting according to their own regulations. Thus, they advertised, with all deliberate external ostentation, what should have been top secret between their soul and God.

Sad countenance . . . disfigure their faces. The Master spared no words for these hypocrites who assumed expressions of unfelt sorrow or superficial humility. Sometimes these expressions involved putting dust or ashes on the head, wearing an irritating hair- or sack-cloth shirt next to the skin, allowing the hair or beard

to go loose or unkempt, and neglecting the appearance in general for the duration of the fast. But where the attitude is hypocritical, probably the one who fasts fools none, for, not having felt the genuine motivation to be thoroughly righteous, he must resort to such disguises as Jesus describes. God had roundly condemned those popular fasting practices of the OT period, which were not expressions of true heart righteousness. (See Isa. 58; Joel 2:13; Zech. 7:1-7) Perhaps the Lord intended a smile-provoking pun, a play on words seen only in the Greek (*aphanizousin . . . hopôs phanôsin*): "They make their (normal) faces to *disappear*, so that they might *appear* to be fasting."

6:17 Anoint thy head, wash thy face. Take any measure necessary to appear as you normally do daily, so that your fasting might never be noticed by men. Anointing one's head is an allusion to the use of various oils as a refreshing skin protection against the dry hot air of Palestine. Whereas hypocrites had used such disguises, as are mentioned above, to hide the insincerity of their fasting, and, at the same time, to establish before men their "sincerity," Jesus would have His disciples disguise their fasting exactly in the opposite way, with a view to guaranteeing their sincerity by reducing fasting to a matter done before God alone.

But, thou when thou fastest. Another personal word to the individual disciple, as in 6:6, also reinforced in Greek by six personal pronouns. But is this a word for every disciple of every age? While Jesus condemned the wrong formality and hypocrisy in some who fasted, it is obvious that He never meant that fasting should be completely eliminated from godly practice altogether. He rather assumes that His disciples will fast, in the same way that He assumes that he will help the needy (6:2-4) or pray (6:5-7). On the other hand, though fasting as a natural expression of anguish of spirit would continue to have its place in the spontaneous response of Jesus' disciple, yet Jesus Himself indicated later that organized, legalized fasting as a rite would not harmonize well with His program. (Cf. Mt. 9:10-17; Mk. 2:18ff; Lk. 5:29ff) Though Paul was clearly discussing various ascetic regulations which originated in "human precepts and doctrines," yet it is clear that his condemnation of all such practices, even when no such regulations would be involved, touches fasting, for it is a clear example of asceticism. For, he says, these practices "have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh." (Col.

2:8—3:17) It should be inconceivable but unfortunately is not impossible that one gratify his lust while enduring a forty-day fast. Thus, making one's body suffer from hunger or thirst, while leaving the mind and imagination untamed, is futile. But one may well have a transformed mind and have crucified his flesh with the affections and lusts thereof, while eating and drinking too. (Cf. Ro. 12:1, 2; Mt. 11:18, 19; Gal. 5:24) Therefore, fasting has no moral value in itself. It finds its only value in connection with those prayers, that repentance, that personal discipline, which fasting accompanies, and for which fasting makes excellent physical preparation. There are more important ways of "afflicting one's soul" than merely by going without food or drink for a specified period: that sweet self-domination that keeps us from retaliating, that stern self-discipline that crucifies lust in our heart, that powerful self-mastery that refuses, in short, to sin.

Why fast then? As notable examples demonstrate, the early Church fasted on certain occasions (Ac. 13:3; 14:23), as did Jesus Himself.

1. Because, since fasting is a natural response, one will naturally fast when sufficient occasion demands it. His vital concern with His impending whirlwind ministry and His desert situation made Jesus' forty-day fast a natural result. Although it is not said that Jesus refused the food brought by the disciples (Jn. 4:6-8, 31-34), yet His preoccupation with the Samaritans pointed out His understanding of true priorities.
2. Because fasting is not so much a duty for its own sake as a physical discipline to prepare one for other duties. In this sense, it may be good for the self-discipline. However, one must not conclude that such periodic self-denial is better moral training than the ordinary temperance or moderation in all things. Denying self at *every* meal is a course much better adapted to preserve the mind and body in the best spiritual tenor any exigency might require.

Therefore, Jesus' disciple is not bound by specific directions concerning the occasions or length of fasts. Rather, in line with the principles of Christian liberty (cf. Ro. 14:1—15:7; I Cor. 6:12-20; chs. 8-11), Jesus allows him to decide for himself to what extent, in what way and how often he should bring his body under subjection to the glory of God.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What does the NT teach about fasting? (regarding the appropriate use or occasions, the manner and purposes of it)
2. What was the ancient practice of fasting among the Jews? What attendant rituals or habits or expressions accompanied fasting?
3. List as many of the outstanding examples of acceptable fasts in the Bible as you can, describing who fasted, why, and, if possible, the results they obtained for having done so. Show why God respected the fast, even though in most cases those who fasted literally disfigured their appearance, wore a sad countenance and were seen of men to be fasting. In other words, what is the difference between their mode of fasting and that condemned by Jesus?
4. Is fasting appointed by God in the OT? Then, is it in force as a law under the present relationship to God by His covenant of grace?

E. THE WEALTH AND WORRIES OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 6:19-34)

TEXT 6:19-34

1. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD EARTHLY TREASURES. (6:19-21)
 19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal:
 20. but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
 21. for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.
2. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD HIS OWN DEDICATION TO GOD. (6:22-24)
 22. The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.
 23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!
 24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

3. HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE. (6:25-34)
25. Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?
26. Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?
27. And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?
28. And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
29. yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
30. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?
31. Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
32. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.
33. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
34. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What are the heavenly treasures we are to store up? (1) Are they the motivation for our serving God now, i.e. we serve God now so that He will reward us later? (2) Or, are they the result of our service to Him, in the sense that in this life we produce a more godlike character which cannot be taken away from us? (3) Are they both? (4) Are they something else?
- b. How are we to lay up such treasures? How can we know whether we are doing so or not?
- c. Does our treasure follow our heart, or our heart our treasure?
- d. Why is it ruinous to love and hoard money?
- e. At what point does our getting and using worldly wealth become idolatrous? How can we identify idolatry in this regard?

- f. Why is self the world's oldest and most dangerous idol? What is the relationship between "laying up treasure on earth," "serving mammon," and "serving self or self-worship"?
- g. Why are we more inclined to trust visible but temporary things and find it so difficult to trust Him who is invisible but has never yet failed us?
- h. Why does Jesus bring up the figure about the eye in this discussion of wealth and worries? What is the connection?
- i. On what basis does Jesus charge His listeners with being "men of little faith"?
- j. Who is the richest person in the community where you live? On what basis do you decide him to be the most wealthy? Does your standard agree with Jesus?
- k. Is being poor necessary to being righteous in God's kingdom? Explain.
- l. Are we to go without health, accident, life, fire or automobile insurance in order to show that we trust God to care for us? What is the relation between insuring ourselves against such dangers and our trusting God?
- m. Is "laying up treasure in heaven" a putting up a quantity of goods in heaven, or an attitude of heart toward God's promises?
- n. To what extent may we work for money (wages) without violating the Lord's declaration that it is impossible to serve God and wealth at the same time?
- o. What do you think Jesus meant to teach about the "whole body full of light"? What is the condition of a man when he is "full of light"?
- p. What is the condition of a man when he is "full of darkness"?
- q. What is the tragedy involved if one's "light" be "darkness"?
- r. Why do you suppose Jesus mentioned "mammon" as the god to which men would offer service in opposition to God? What is so significant about slavery to wealth?
- s. What one fundamental sin finds expression in both greed and anxiety?
- t. What is so wrong, according to Jesus, with saying, "A man must live"? Is it not true? Why?
- u. How is it true that "the morrow will be anxious for itself"?
- v. What kind of impact would this entire section have upon the Jewish audience to which Jesus addressed these words? Does He contradict or confirm their concept of the Messianic kingdom and its attendant blessings? In what way does He do this?

w. The Biblical view of the heart of man usually takes into consideration his intellect, his will, his affections and his conscience. In verses 19-24 which of these phases of man's being receive emphasis and in what connection are they mentioned?

PARAPHRASE

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where it grows moth-eaten and rusty, and where thieves break in and steal it. Rather lay up for yourselves wealth in heaven, where there is neither moth nor rust to destroy it, nor thieves to break in or steal it. For where you put your wealth, you unavoidably put your heart there too.

"The lamp of the body is the eye. Now if your eyes are sound, you will have light for your whole body. On the other hand, if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if all the "light" that you have is darkness, how intense that darkness must be!

"Nobody can be a slave to two masters, because either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot be a slave to God and to Money at the same time.

"This is why I say to you to stop worrying about your living, wondering what you shall have to eat or drink, or about your body, wondering what you can get to wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more important than its clothing? Surely it is! Take a good look at the birds of the air: they do not sow nor reap nor store up food in graneries, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more precious to Him than they? Of course you are! On the other hand, which of you can add a single hour to his life's span by worrying? And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wild flowers grow: they do not wear themselves out working nor do they spin thread, yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glorious splendor did not clothe himself like one of these flowers. But if this is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is there today and is tossed into the oven tomorrow, will He not all the more do so for you, O men with little confidence? Certainly He will! Do not then ask anxiously, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What will we have to wear?' That is what pagans are always seeking. Do not talk this way because your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. Rather, seek first the Kingdom and the righteousness that He requires, and all these neces-

sities will be provided you. So, do not worry about tomorrow, since tomorrow will have worries of its own. Let each day's trouble be enough for that day."

SUMMARY

Put your trust in God alone! Put your whole confidence in things eternal, for only they are permanent. Concentrate your attention and service upon God and His promises, since double-mindedness is a really impossible course. It brings on unnecessary worries and draws the attention away from God. Real faith is able to concentrate upon God's rule and provisions and accept life as a matter of course, living one day at a time.

NOTES

Because Jesus' teaching in this section is many-sided, we offer two outlines in the attempt to present more of the content of His message. It will be noted that Jesus' basic argument is "Not that—but this." Therefore, in order to present as clearly as possible the negative and positive aspects or elements of His teaching, we outline the passage accordingly.

"The Controlling Objective in Life: Undivided Trust in God"

NEGATIVE

"DANGERS THAT MENACE THE FAITH OF DISCIPLES":

Covetousness that is manifested according to circumstances as:

I. AVARICE (6:19-24)

A. Treasures on earth means one's heart set on earth which means total loss!

1. Moths corrupt it;

POSITIVE

I. "TRUST ONLY GOD" (6:19-24)

Proposition: Reasons why those who would be His disciples must put their trust *only in God*:

A. Because earthly treasures are transient, ephemeral, while only heavenly treasures endure (6:19, 20)

NEGATIVE

2. Rust eats it;
 3. Thieves steal it.
(6:19-21)
- B. Obscured judgment (6:23)
which leads to further moral
darkness in every other de-
cision and act.
- C. Indecision impedes concen-
tration of energies and is
virtually impossible (6:24)

II. ANXIETY (6:25-34)

- A. Worry places a false and
exaggerated value upon
earthly welfare. (6:25)
- B. Worry reflects on God's
loving care for man who is
more precious to Him than
birds (6:26)
- C. Worry fails to resolve life's
basic problem (6:27)

POSITIVE

- B. Because earthly riches cap-
ture the heart, while heav-
enly treasures cause us to
keep our heart set on
heaven. (6:21)
- C. Because the selfish quest
for wealth blinds and des-
troys human personality but
heavenly riches keep our
moral vision unimpaired
(6:22, 23)
- D. Because to please two mas-
ters is impossible: the mere
quest of wealth is sinful
because incompatible with
true love and loyalty to
God (6:24)
- II. "ONLY TRUST GOD" (6:25-34)
- A. God gave life and the body,
and can be trusted for
things necessary to sustain
life (6:25)
- B. Lesser creatures than man
do not pile up goods for
an unknown and unknow-
able future (6:26)
- C. Worry is useless (6:27)
(God who has ordained the
length of our life and the
make-up of our body can
surely be trusted to sustain
it.)

NEGATIVE

- D. Worry about clothes seeks to realize a false ideal, and were it a true ideal, it is patently unattainable (6:28, 29)
- E. Worry destroys confidence in God (6:30)
- F. Worry betrays a practical paganism (6:31, 32)
- G. Worry would deny us all that is really good, important and eternal (6:33)
- H. Worry is presumptuous care about a day that God has neither promised nor given yet (6:34)

POSITIVE

- D. Surely the generosity which is so lavish to a flower of a day will not forget man, the crown of God's creation (6:28-30)
- E. Anxiety for clothes is faithlessness (6:30)
- F. Worry is beyond comprehension in one who has God as his Father (6:31, 32)
- G. God knows our needs, so we can concentrate upon doing His will and seeking to be right according to His standards and He will provide (6:33)
- H. Worry can be defeated by living one day at a time (6:34). Every day brings enough burdens and problems. It is enough to deal with these without unnecessarily borrowing trouble from the future.

All that has preceded this section is sweet sentimentalism and unrealistic unless Jesus is able to remake men. Jesus knows that He cannot leave man as he is, bombarded by contradictory ethics and driven by inward desires and harassed by daily worries. Man must possess a moral principle that will rivet his attention on God, cause him to reject worldly ideals and treasure heaven above all other joys. Further, Jesus knows that there are two persistent, dangerous rivals to that one true objective that must command our undivided loyalty and effort, two rivals which will choke out His word every time: the worries of the world, the worries of life (Lk. 8:14) and the deceitful attractiveness of wealth (Mt. 13:22). Jesus must destroy man's confidence in wealth as a genuine support, and, by building

his confidence in the Father, He must exterminate man's worry. Only thus can the Master hope to expect men to take the Kingdom of God seriously and reach for the righteousness Jesus is requiring. Unless a man regard all earthly prizes as filth, he will not be much interested in leaving them to follow Jesus.

This section, if there were no other proof, would demonstrate that Jesus' unique message is from God and could not be the product of the highest insights of rabbinical thinking. These words (6:19-34) must have sounded a wrong note in the ears of those Jews whose popular Messianic expectations required that the anticipated Son of David bring them a high degree of worldly prosperity, honors and pleasures. (Cf. Mt. 19:24, 25; 20:20-28; Lk. 22:24) Far from seeing any danger in wealth and far from believing that, as a rule, it promotes unrighteousness, the Jews tended to regard wealth as a special blessing for their carefulness in observing the Law. Characteristically, the Pharisees thought of themselves as the unchallengeable proof of the causal connection between righteousness and riches. (Cf. Lk. 16:14; 20:47) However, in terms of human motivations, it is but a hairbreadth's difference between glorifying and seeking wealth as one's just deserts on the one hand, and the greedily grasping after wealth as one's universal answer to all problems. And the children of Abraham had to hear this message whether it fit their scheme of Messianic prophecy or not.

The immediate connection with the preceding section (6:1-18) is particularly enlightening, for there Jesus warned against making the praise of men the end of our religious actions. Here He turns from His attack on man's thinking too much of the praise of others to that self-deception which thinks too much of the riches of earth and makes them the end of all his daily efforts. And just as the cure for the former hypocrisy was a right appreciation of God's judgment and a keeping of one's heart set on the Father, even so here the disciples must keep the Father ever before their eyes. (Cf. 6:24, 26, 30, 32)

Jesus must challenge His follower to examine carefully his life to determine what is the really final controlling object of life. Running through the entire section is the necessity to fix one's undivided trust in God. Divided loyalties dissipate the energies, nullify one's efforts and warp one's judgment. Though it would seem that He is talking about two widely separated subjects, i.e.

avarice and anxiety, yet they are two expressions of the same covetousness. Both sins are obvious evidence of a basic worry, of insecurity, and of a desire for "a little bit more," which in turn are evidence of a misplaced trust. Therefore, the Lord must take men's eyes off their gold and fix their hearts on God.

I. AVARICE, or TRUST ONLY GOD

(6:19-24; cf. Lk. 12:32-34; 16:9-13)

A. THE ALLURE OF ACQUISITION AS AGAINST THE APPEAL OF ABIDING ATTAINMENTS (6:19-21)

6:19 **Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth.**

What makes a man desire to hoard up the treasures of earth? Basically, it is worry and insecurity, but covetousness plays an important role in this. (Cf. Lk. 12:13-21; I Tim. 6:5b-10. Note Paul's emphasis: "Those who desire to be rich . . . love of money . . . this craving . . . set their hopes on riches.") This is no condemnation of reasonable thrift or of the banking system of the day (Cf. Mt. 25:27), but a protest against that craze which so often drives men to set their whole heart on the amassing of wealth for selfish purposes as the only worthwhile purpose in life. Millions in property is not necessarily sin, nor is holding capital funds on earth a direct violation of Jesus' prohibition, if one holds them in use as a responsible stewardship and uses them for the advancement of God's kingdom. Having possessions is not wrong, but we commit sin when they have us.

The deceptive attractiveness of earthly wealth is its being subject to all manner of destructive forces. (Cf. Jas. 5:1-6) Jesus is saying, "Do not be a fool and treasure what you cannot keep, what nature is bent on destroying and what the envy and covetousness of others is planning to seize!" A **moth** can ruin the most expensive garment laid up in a chest. **Rust consumes** man's most precious items of metal. The word Jesus used which is translated *rust* (*brōsis*) literally means *eating*. Thus, the eating of it makes human food disappear (*aphanizei*) in the same way that the moth eats holes in fabrics. **Thieves break through** (literally: *dig through* the sun-dried brick or mud walls of the house and thus effect an entrance) **and steal**. In your greed to lay up earthly treasures, do not forget the greed of others, who, despite all your precautions, are able to relieve you of your possessions.

If in 6:21 Jesus is challenging us to examine the value of that which we treasure, He might be suggesting here that there is further folly involved in hoarding earthly wealth because of its relative worthlessness as measured against the true wealth of heaven. What is gold on earth is street paving material in heaven! What a fool is he who hoards mere sand and gravel. And what is worse, there is real peril in piling up earthly wealth, not in the possibility of their loss or ruin, since this happens also to the most righteous of men, but rather in the probability that the wealthy themselves are thereby imperilled. (Cf. I Tim. 6:9) A man may gain the whole world and after all lose *himself*! (Mt. 16:26) Those who spend life for the pleasures and riches of this world are getting cheated in the universe' greatest swindle. Even in this world, old sinners write bitterly that the anticipation of their fallacious and fleeting joys was much greater than their realization. The devil is a liar: earthly wealth cannot satisfy. The love of money will ruin everything! The rich young ruler refused to understand this (Mt. 19:21) and the Apostles almost missed their grip on this truth (Mt. 19:25, 27). Mary understood that earthly cares are not the whole of life; Martha failed on that occasion (Lk. 10:41, 42). The OT had taught much the same message (Psa. 49:6; 52:7; 62:10; Prov. 11:28).

6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, because they are sure, not subject to the influences that destroy all of earth's brightest gems. *Lay up* suggests "so to delight in something that we always long to have more of it," whether good or bad (see Mt. 5:6; 6:33; Lk. 12:13-21); this speaks of our attitude toward wealth. Since it is impossible to send earth's riches commodities into that heavenly country, because life there is enjoyed on a far different plane, it would seem therefore that Jesus' admonition refers primarily to our attitude as to what constitutes true wealth. If so, He is saying, "Treasure heavenly wealth. Accept my viewpoint as to what constitutes the true riches. Put your dependence upon God's promises."

But how is it possible to lay up *in heaven* our treasures? As suggested in the introductory section ("The Reasonableness of Rewards"), Jesus ever holds up before His disciples rewards and blessings of a spiritual nature. Another way of stating this same injunction might be: "Consider heaven your treasure!" That is, a right view of that which really satisfies one's soul—the love of God and the fellowship to be enjoyed with Him and His, a clear conscience and

an eternal joy—these restore a proper perspective that causes one to re-evaluate all of earth's wealth in terms of winning an eternity with God. (See Psa. 16:2, 5, 6; 73:25; Phil. 3:8) The important question to ask is not "How much treasure must I lay up?" but "What kind of treasure?" God is the Cashier of heaven and He accepts only one kind of coin: character. And when sounded, that coin must ring with deeds and faithfulness. We cannot send Him our gold, because they are not on the gold standard up there. *Laying up treasure in heaven* is equivalent to being "rich toward God" and the opposite of "laying up treasure for oneself" (Lk. 12:21). Luke 12:33 suggests that money given in mercy to those who need it, even if it means great personal sacrifice to do so, is the means of providing oneself with heavenly treasure. How so? The command to give alms is aimed at the good of the giver, that his heart may be freed from covetousness and trained in generous service to others. This produces character, and *that* God accepts as true wealth. The irony that marks the difference between heavenly and earthly treasures is that we keep only what we give away, but we must lose all that we have kept! (Study Mt. 10:39; 16:24-26; 19:23-29; Jn. 12:25) Paul summarizes this idea perfectly and shows the clear relation between the set of the heart and one's attitude toward heavenly wealth, as well as how to lay up riches in heaven:

Religion is a means of gain to the man who knows when he has enough (wealth). We brought nothing with us into the world, and we cannot take anything out. Surely, then, if we have food and clothing, we shall be satisfied with these. But men who *set their hearts on* being rich fall into temptations and traps, into many foolish and damaging desires that plunge men into ruin and destroy them. The *love of money* is the source of all evil. In *the struggle to get* it some men have wandered away from the faith and have impaled themselves on untold sorrows . . . Tell the ones who are rich in this world's goods not to overestimate themselves nor *to set their hopes on* anything so uncertain as wealth. Tell them to set their hope on God who generously supplies us all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be ready to give away and share, *thus laying up a treasure* for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they might grasp the really true life.

(I Tim. 6:6-10, emphasis supplied)

Where neither moth nor rust . . . nor thieves. An investment in God's promises is not subject to failure and loss; one is not "being practical" to disbelieve God's promises in order to store up earthly treasure. One danger of wealth is that it causes us to fail to make life's best investment in the kingdom of God: "a hundred-fold in this life, and in the age to come eternal life!" (Mk. 10:29, 30) Paul expressed this same concept, adding also the present body to the list of earth's perishables which must be left behind in favor of an eternal abode in the heavens (II Cor. 4:16—5:9). Peter (I Pet. 1:14) exhausts the vocabulary as he holds before the eyes of suffering Christians that "imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance kept in heaven for you." (See also Heb. 10:34; Phil. 3:18) This is the reason that it becomes absolutely imperative that we rest our confidence in God instead of in our earth-orientated "common sense," because there is so much in everyday life that seems absolutely to contradict what Jesus is saying we must believe. This is the "acid-test" as to which world we think is real and permanent: this one with all its seemingly cold, hard realities of fame and famine, of wealth and worries; or God's world for which He would prepare us.

6:21 For where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also. Jesus seems to be using the word "heart" here in the sense of one's affections. After all, what really gives value to a treasure is the affection of the heart. Nothing on earth really possesses permanent and objective value anyway, for value is too often a relative, subjective judgment based upon some temporary usefulness or on some relative necessity. This declaration of Jesus thus becomes a grave warning: "Choose your treasure well, because, for good or ill, it will take your heart with it!" Remember Lot's wife (Lk. 17:32, 33; Gen. 19:12-26) If our chosen treasure is earthly, it must partake of the transitoriness of all that is earthly and be forever lost when we relax our grip on it in death. On the other hand, if our earthly struggle has been for heavenly wealth, death only frees us to go to the eternal and real source of our joy and longing.

This is a psychological principle ever true: when a man's thought and effort are concentrated upon gaining some prize, either heavenly or earthly, then the whole heart, i.e. the entire man, will become deeply involved in the effort. The man himself can think of nothing else. It will be the subject of his conversations, the content of his daydreams. To the disciple who would ask whether *he* be laying up heavenly or earthly riches, Jesus is replying, "Go looking for your

riches and you'll find your heart there too! They will be together." Jesus knows that He has nothing to worry about from the man who has his heart fixed on heaven, because that man will realign every other element of his life behind that one goal. (See special study on "Temptation" after 4:1-11)

Does Jesus intend these "treasures in heaven" to be: (1) the cause, the stimulation or the inducement for our work, or (2) the result or product of our earthly work? That is, are they something we produce or receive? Does He mean that we produce character by following His instructions, and thus produce a treasure that is eternal? Or, is He insisting that we keep our eyes fixed on heaven as our goal or treasure, thus producing a character that is capable of enjoying the wealth of God? The Apostles (Col. 3:1-3; II Pet. 1:3, 4) seem to suggest that by diverting all our interest toward where Christ is, we will the more readily become like Him. And if the treasures we seek as the result of our work are spiritual goals, then they can also be the rewards for our service. So it is both, for Jesus reveals that a spiritual, godly character, by definition, is one which cherishes God above all earthly treasures, and reciprocally grows more and more like Him.

Psychologically, does our treasure follow our heart, or does our heart follow our treasure? Is Jesus' proposition reversible: "Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also"? That is, do we put our heart into something in which our treasure is involved, or do we put our money into that which has engaged our heart? Sometimes we are forced to spend our time, energy and talent for that which little interests our heart. But the sheer force of habit and involvement may easily draw our heart into a greater concern and may even produce an affection that is very strong.

For instance, many with high aspirations for accomplishment chafe under the necessity to earn a living, since it requires valuable time and drains necessary energy away from their real goals. Thus, earning a living may force a man to lay up his heart and treasure for something that, to him, is really a drudgery.

But these cases are probably less numerous than those where one has already deeply involved his heart and, as an expression of his affections, he pours out his treasures to realize the satisfaction of his heart. If so, Jesus is saying, "Set your heart first, decide what will be your true treasure, because you will pay all else to get it!" (Cf. Mt. 13:44-46)

If there seems to be a confusion between "treasures" considered as one's present possessions, and "treasures" as the goal of one's life, the confusion is an understandable one, since we all have a hard time distinguishing between what we are working for and that which we possess when it comes to resting our heart, hopes and confidence on them. The Lord's principle adequately touches both concepts however.

Here are some critical questions about our ideas about wealth:

1. What does a man consider to be his true wealth?
2. How much does he think it is worth?
3. Whose does he think it is?
4. Can he live without it?

Here are some tests to determine our attachment to this earth:

5. Am I strongly resolved to become comfortably wealthy?
6. Am I in a hurry to be that way?
7. Do I regard my neighbor's thriving prosperity with envy and discontent?
8. Am I satisfied with my financial position? Why?
9. Do I trust my money to get me whatever I want?
10. Are my time, conversation and dreams spent chiefly upon earthly projects?
11. Do I grow angry, out of sorts or discontented when for any reason I fail to realize my financial goals, suffer losses or poverty sets in?
12. Am I willing to sacrifice my conscience or neglect my duty to better my financial picture or to hold my present position?
13. When in trouble, to what do I turn for relief?

B. THE ACCURACY OF APPREHENSION ALREADY AFFECTS THE ATTITUDE (6:22, 23)

6:22 The lamp of the body is the eye. This is a metaphor within an allegory: *the eye* is not literally *the lamp* of the body but is the means by which light is admitted into the body and interpreted for the body. Hence, figuratively it may be said to be *the light of the body*. As seen elsewhere (Lk. 11:34-36) this same figure could

fit other discourses. So the meaning must be determined from the context in which Matthew records it here. But Jesus does not explain the various elements of the allegory, as He sometimes does for parables (Cf. Mt. 13:1-43). The context of this allegory, 6:19-34, is entirely devoted to the viewpoint of the wise and godly man regarding wealth and worry. This little figure, then, is supposed to throw light on the entire section and especially the verses which precede and follow it: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (6:21) "You cannot serve God and mammon." (6:24)

The eye is that organ of the body which receives *light* and, by means of the optic nerve, transmits this light to the brain and thence to *the body*. The accuracy of the image received by the eye, that is, the degree to which that image reflects the reality in nature, is controlled or affected by the quality of the eye. All other things being equal, *if the eye is sound*, the image received is accurate and so is received by the body as real illumination. However, *if the eye is diseased* or in some way abnormal or in one of the many stages of blindness, the individual is left in the dark to the extent of that abnormalcy of his eyes. This is the literal paraphrase of what Jesus says; but what does He intend to suggest by each of the terms?

The eye is probably to be identified with man's intellect, his conscience, his moral vision, his viewpoint, his way of looking at things, his philosophy. *The body* becomes that major part of man which is affected by his outlook, namely his actions, the way he expresses himself on the basis of his way of looking at things. The *light* or *darkness* then stands for the degree to which the man comprehends reality as it actually is. Since all depends upon the quality of the man's eye, that is the orientation of his convictions, it becomes imperative that we learn what kind of eye is *single* and what *evil*.

But here the difficulty begins, since the Greek words used are capable of various translations which in turn depend upon the interpretation given to the passage:

1. Literal, physical health:

- a. *haplous*: "sound" (See Arndt-Gingrich, 85 and 697 for
- b. *poneros*: "sick" classical illustrations of these meanings.)

2. Figuratively: Generosity vs. Niggardliness:
 - a. *haplous*: "generous," cf. Ro. 12:8; II Cor. 8:2; 9:11, 13; Jas. 1:5; Prov. 22:9.
 - b. *ponêros*: "grudging, niggardly, ungenerous, mean stingy," cf. Dt. 15:9 LXX; Prov. 23:6; 28:22; esp. Mt. 20:15; Mk. 7:22.
3. Figuratively: Single-mindedness vs. Duplicity:
 - a. *haplous*: "single, simple, fixed upon one object, one goal" one Master, unadulterated with mixed motives, sincere, holy" (cf. Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; II Cor. 11:3)
 - b. *ponêros*: "double-minded, spoiled, vitiated by many selfish motives, evil." (Cf. Jas. 1:5-8) Though *ponêros* does not specifically mean "double-minded, etc." but more generally, "evil, wicked, worthless, etc.," this idea may be derived from its antithesis (*haplous*) which, in this case, may mean "single, simple, etc."

Obviously the first meaning is not the interpretation, since it is the literal expression which gives rise to Jesus' meaning. The meaning must be sought between the latter two. It may be that Jesus has deliberately chosen two words that are capable of four meanings that all express His intent. For it is quite true that one's selfishness (or generosity) affects his capacity to appreciate what Jesus was saying about wealth. It is equally true that one's capacity to act upon Jesus' instructions depends upon his true and final allegiance. Again, the second and third definitions might not be so far apart after all, since one's innate generosity or selfishness is really determined by the single-mindedness with which he expresses his life's one great devotion.

Another demonstration that one's single-minded dedication (or duplicity) affects his generosity (or selfishness), and vice versa, is seen in the immediate context preceding (6:1-18) where only the man, whose mind was fixed upon God, could really give, pray and fast; all else was hypocrisy. The succeeding context (6:24) preaches the same message: "Choose well the one guiding principle of your life, whether your one Master will be God, in which case you will crucify your selfishness in the generous service you render others, or whether you will serve Mammon, in which case you will exalt selfishness to the throne of your heart. Your moral vision is definitely affected by that choice."

Thus, Jesus is at the same time making an observation and sounding a warning: He observes, by means of this allegory, that a man will be guided in his actions by the convictions which form his world-view; if these are mistaken or wrongly oriented, they cannot be trusted to give him true illumination regarding the truth about wealth and worry. The warning which underlies the observation ("*How great is that darkness!*") is: "Beware lest your worldly philosophy be nothing but moral blindness and failure to grasp the point of view from which I thus speak!" The specific viewpoint to which Jesus has reference is the right philosophy regarding the source and use of wealth as well as whether one will be able to appreciate the true wealth involved in trusting God. (Cf. Eph. 1:18f with Lk. 16:14)

C. ALLEGIANCE TO THE ALMIGHTY ALONE (6:24)

6:24 **No man can serve two masters.** Jesus' expression is stronger than the English versions render it, for He said, "No man can *be a slave to (douleuein)* two lords." It is assumed that we were created to serve someone or something, (Cf. Gen. 2:15) but just one, not two. Two or more masters might jointly own a slave, but in this case he is really the slave of one entity; therefore, there is no contradiction of Jesus' proposition. In such a case Jesus' proposition is yet more clearly true when there is a contradiction between the orders of those who think they have a right to command the slave: he cannot obey contradictory orders. It is logically impossible both to do and not do at the same time.

It is also a psychological impossibility because the inner, personal motives of the slave will sooner or later force him to choose which master he desires to please. He would only delude himself if he thought it possible to recognize two lordships. (Cf. Ro. 6:16) But why did Jesus state so bluntly what should be so obvious? Because men of the world say that we can serve two masters. With a little subtlety here and some compromise there under the guise of diplomacy and tact, we can serve both. (Cf. Jas. 4:4; I Jn. 2:15, 16) This is the self-deception that would grasp at both treasures of heaven and earth.

You cannot serve God and mammon. *Mammon* is a common Aramaic word for "wealth, property, riches." (Arndt-Gingrich, 491) "There is doubtless personification here, but there is no proof that there was in NT times a Syrian deity called Mammon." (ISBE, 1972) The Lord does not here condemn the lawful and honest getting

of money through diligent labor and wise care of funds. Careful stewardship in the gaining and handling of wealth is perfectly in harmony with Jesus' warning here. (Cf. Lk. 16:1-13) But unless a man uses his money for God, it quickly becomes obvious which is his real god. (Cf. Heb. 13:5) Note the genius of the Master: rather than name some pagan deity which would date this warning and seem to limit it to that era, the Lord renders His admonition readily applicable to any people or age. Wealth is the kind of god that a person can carry with him anywhere or hord up in his treasury. Wealth is the *god of selfishness*, since man will abandon the heavenly Father for it; rare is the man who ever left the service of wealth to give himself to God. (Cf. Mt. 7:13, 14) Money earned is coined life; money spent for self is a life spent for self; money wasted is life wasted. Mammon-worship is nothing but civilized life which organizes itself for itself without considering God. Another word for this covetousness is *idolatry!* (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; I Cor. 5:11) It is clearly idolatry because it is the taking away from God what is His due and giving it to a wretched creature. (Cf. Mt. 22:37; Ro. 1:25)

You cannot be a slave (douleuein) to God and mammon. This is a disjunctive proposition; we must choose! This declaration is the hard-won conclusion of Jesus' wilderness battle (Mt. 4:10). Jay, cited by Pink (215, 216) shows the intransigence of the two masters, the impossibility to enslave oneself to both:

Their orders are diametrically opposed. The one commands you to walk by faith, the other to walk by sight; the one to be humble, the other to be proud; the one to set your affections on things above, the other to set them on the things that are on the earth; the one to look at the things unseñ and eternal, the other to look at the seen and temporal; the one to have your citizenship in heaven, the other to cleave to the dust; the one to be careful for nothing, the other to be all anxiety; the one to be content with such as you have, the other to enlarge your desires as the grave; the one to be ready to distribute, the other to withhold; the one to look at the things of others, the other to look at one's own things; the one to seek happiness in the Creator, the other to seek it in the creature. Is it not plain that there is no serving two such masters?

This striking ultimatum forms the perfect transition between Jesus' comments on wealth and His teaching on worry (6:25-34). The idolatry of covetousness is at the bottom of all straining after wealth and all worry over poverty and is as fatal to one's spiritual perception as might be imagined. This is true because this worldly-mindedness is nothing but an unbeliever's over-estimate of material good. It is only a matter of circumstances whether this covetousness will show itself in raking in the money or in solicitous worry. It is the same sin for the worldly-minded rich man as for the covetous poor man. It matters little to Jesus whether a man is rich or poor, but it matters greatly whose possessions he thinks they are, where he thinks he got them, and whether he could do without them. Jesus is demanding that we choose whom we will serve, trust and love: God or gold. Some might be tempted to say, "There is no danger of MY laying up earthly treasure because so little of this world's wealth comes my way that I can scarcely scrape together the barest daily necessities!" But the poor must face this same decision as much as the rich. People, rich or poor, who worry are people who forget to pray. People who pray and continue to worry are double-minded, not having set their minds upon one Master, God. They do not yet trust God. (Cf. Jas. 1:5-8)

II. ANXIETY, or ONLY TRUST GOD (6:25-34; cf. Lk. 12:22-31)

A. AN APPEAL FOR AN ACCURATE APPRAISAL (6:25)

6:25 **Therefore I say unto you** is the definite link between the principle just enunciated and the application which follows. *Be not anxious* (*mê merimnate*) or "Be not unduly concerned" or "Do not worry" are now much clearer translations than the KJV which said "Take no thought." "Taking thought" 300 years ago meant exactly what is involved in modern "anxiety;" "taking thought" had no connection with giving careful thought to a problem or project. In fact, in this part of His discourse, Jesus is actually commanding His listeners to give very careful thought to their life, to reflect upon what really sustains it.

To understand the correct antithesis of Jesus' meaning, let us see what He is NOT teaching. Barclay (I, 258) notes: "It is not ordinary prudent foresight, such as becomes a man, that Jesus forbids; it is *worry*. Jesus is not advocating a shiftless, thriftless, reckless, thoughtless improvident attitude to life; He is forbidding a care-

worn, worried fear that takes all the joy out of life." As seen in the parallel (Lk. 12:22-48), man must think wisely and plan discreetly concerning the necessities of life. (Cf. Prov. 6:6-8; II Cor. 12:14; I Tim. 5:8; II Th. 3:6-15) We are commanded to regard rightly and to plan seriously the use of these God-given blessings. Many people are careless about what they eat and drink, and they suffer for it. Some are thoughtless about their dress, and they become a disgrace to the race. They become careless about property and God holds them responsible for it. (Cf. Lk. 16:9-13) Jesus does not countenance such imprudence, improvidence and carelessness.

Nor is Jesus pleading for utter indifference to earthly needs or material goods, for He admits our NEED for all these things (6:32). There is no asceticism here.

Jesus is teaching against worry. Four times more he will fire verbal broadsides against anxiety (vv. 27, 28, 31, 34; see also Lk. 10:41; 12:11, 22; Phil. 4:6) Worry about earthly treasure and bodily needs turns the heart from God to the slavery to mammon. This lusting after things that we do not have, this uneasiness and distraction of mind is sin and a sure sign that the heart is fixed on earth!

Be not anxious about your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Note that the phrase "what ye shall drink" has been omitted from more ancient manuscripts than those that contain it. If Jesus did not say it, the parallel with His later comment is much closer. Jesus is preaching against that false sense of values created by distrustful worry about the necessities of life. He is appealing for a return to sanity and a re-evaluation of those elements which sustain and bless our life: *food and clothing*. **Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the raiment?** His rhetorical question is well-calculated to appeal for a recognition of the right order in man's nature. That order of importance is a descending order:

1. *The life and the body.* Jesus' word (*psychê*) is often used to express the life-principle which is the union of soul and body. (Cf. Gen. 9:4 LXX; Mt. 2:20; 20:28; Lk. 12:20; Jn. 10:11-18; Ac. 2:27; 20:10; Ro. 11:3; Rev. 8:9) Jesus defined under what aspect He means the word *life* (*psychê*) by means of the questions regarding its sustenance: "*What shall we eat? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*" (6:25a, 31) Therefore it is clear that He is speaking in a Hebrew

poetic parallelism: *life* in the first member is equated with *body* in the second, while *food* in the first is changed to *clothing* in the second member of the parallel. This gnomic poetry form is really conveying positive information:

"Life is more important than food;
And the body is more than the raiment."

Thus, while *the body* is to be taken as parallel to *the life*, the mention of this particular phase of life advances the thought to introduce another senseless worry: that which covers *the body*, or, *clothing*.

But merely because of this parallel in His speech does not mean that Jesus is equating all that is one's life (*psychê*) with his *body* (*sôma*), because there is more to life than its union with a body. There is clear evidence that *the soul* of a man is also expressed by this word. (Cf. Mt. 10:28, 39; 11:29; 16:25, 26; Mk. 8:36, 37; Lk. 9:24; 17:33; Heb. 10:39; Jas. 1:21; 5:20; I Pet. 1:9, 22; also Arndt-Gingrich, 901, 902 on *psychê*) Thus, Jesus is saying, "You yourself are more important than the food you eat, the body you inhabit or the clothing that covers it!" Men are prone to be more concerned about making physical life possible than about making life worth living. Mere physical existence is not worth the trouble to sustain it, if the problems of the soul are left unsolved. Life does not consist in the abundance or paucity of the things one possesses, eats or wears, but in the God-like quality of his personality, in the strength of his moral character.

2. *The food* and *the raiment* are definitely secondary matters when measured against the infinitely higher value of *the life* and *the body*, and, hence, are unworthy objects of anxiety. Clothing and food (cf. *brôsis*, 6:19 note) may be echoes of Jesus' previous warning about the transitoriness of earthly possessions and His caution against putting one's trust in them or thinking of them as final goals. (6:19) Clothing is important (see 6:30, 32), but can never be as important as that body which clothes him who is made in the image of God! (II Cor. 5:2-5)

Therefore, in terms of priorities, the body is far less important than one's spiritual existence, but it has needs far more pressing than

the lack of clothing. The inferiority of the body compared to the man who dwells therein is seen at the point where the man leaves the body. At death none of us will have need of food and clothing. What folly to make our chief concern those things which perish with the using and over which death has dominion!

Back of this order stands God who established it, gave the life, formed the body and sewed its first suit of clothes (Gen. 3:21). Dependence is the law of our being, because we were obligated to leave to God the size, form, color and nature of our body. Why should we not trust Him for its maintenance? But even the most spiritual of us argue in exactly the opposite way: "I must live! I must be clothed and fed! I must know where I will live, where my next meal is coming from! I must have security!" The great concern of such lives is obviously not God but how one is going to be enabled to live.

Jesus is objecting to worry because it gives to earthly well-being a false and exaggerated value and ignores the true priorities that must supercede those things which are the common objects of worry, such as food and clothing. (Cf. Jn. 4:34; Phil. 3:9; Rev. 3:5, 18; 7:9; 19:8)

B. AN APPRECIABLE ADVANTAGE ABOVE ANIMALS (6:26)

6:26 Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Jesus uses this illustration purposely to show the utter unreasonableness, from His standpoint, of being so anxious about the means of living. The birds *do not sow, reap nor garner*, for these are superior advantages that God has given to man. Birds do not have these possibilities. The thing condemned is not this work, because also a bird is a hard-working little creature, going out and laboring for its daily supply of food. Jesus' point is that, even without man's superior advantages, there is not in birds that straining to see the unforeseeable future and seek security in things accumulated for it. They live literally "hand to mouth," and yet they do not worry, because they are fulfilling the law of life that God has infused into their being. They are what they are, not because of their concern for themselves, but because of the concern of our heavenly Father for them! Their law of life requires that they live from day to day without worry for future supply. (Cf. Job 38:41; Psa. 104:25, 27; 145:14-16; 147:9)

And your heavenly Father feedeth them. He is their Creator; He is our Father. (Cf. Mt. 5:16, 43, 48; 6:2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 14, 18, 32 with Mt. 10:29-31) Already Jesus is testing the moral sensitivity of His hearers, even before He poses that poignant rhetorical question. But HOW does *the heavenly Father feed them?* Into their nature He has fused the instincts necessary for their survival, such as diet, migratory habits, etc. But these secondary causes for birds' actions are no less of the heavenly Father than if He operated directly in every single case. (Lk. 12:6, 7; Heb. 1:3) Thus it is not the thought of the little bird about itself that provides its food, but the thought of the heavenly Father. It does not worry for its food; it just obeys the law of its life and becomes what it is. The law of our life is that we work for our food (Gen. 1:28; 2:15; 3:17-19). We were created to work, not to worry. *Gathering into barns* is no sin, even though it means saving for a future need; it is no more sin than *sowing and reaping*.

Are not ye of much more value than they? This rhetorical question is designed to arouse interest and personal concern in Jesus' audience. Jesus would keep His disciples' eyes ever on the Father: *of much more value* to whom? Will God nourish birds and forget His own children? But your worry about your nourishment, whether you realize it or not, reflects on God's love for you! (Ro. 8:32) It also reflects on His sense of priorities: it assumes that He busies Himself with things of less importance in His universe while ignoring man whom He created in His own likeness and for His own personal fellowship! It also puts God into a religious compartment, separating Him from the practical affairs of life like food getting. The disciples are being put to a severe test: "Is that relation which God sustains to you a vital one and does His daily provision really count for anything, or is your faith mere theory and cant?" If we really trust Him, we may work without worrying!

C. ANXIETY NOT ABLE TO ALTER ALTITUDE NOR ADVANCE AGE
(6:27)

6:27 **And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?** Jesus word (*belikia*), translated *measure of life* (ASV) or *stature* (KJV) is particularly interesting because it is just enough ambiguous to suggest two fruitful lessons:

1. *Physical stature, height* (*bêlikia*; cf. Lk. 19:3; perhaps also Lk. 2:52; Eph. 4:13) Plummer (*Luke*, 326f) objects that not many people give anxious thought to the problem of adding the length of the forearm (a *pêchus*, or cubit) to their stature because it would produce a monstrosity and would not be spoken of as something insignificant (Lk. 12:25, 26). However, this objection looks only at the adults as they were at that moment. But they were not always this way. They began as a being smaller than a span and grew by the gradual increase that God had ordained in the laws governing growth. Neither anxious worry nor loss of sleep nor beating one's brains about it could have altered the exact height of a child at any stage of his growth.
2. *Length of life* (*bêlikia*; see Arndt-Gingrich, 345, for extra-biblical evidence of this meaning) Many people do worry about the prolongation of their allotted age by any amount. The image called up by this expression of Jesus is that of a man anxiously hurrying across the years of his life. He stumbles, grasping for his last breath and reaches out, clawing his way forward in the effort to have just another 18 inches along the path of life. He dies miserably short of this least goal! All of his previous worries have been in vain, because, worry or no, his life has run its course.

This time Jesus' use of the rhetorical question, "*Which of you . . . ?*" brings the hearer to make a pragmatic judgment about the actual results of worry. It is as if Jesus were saying, "Your life of worry shows that you do not accept MY theory about God's providence and care. Let us examine YOUR theory of constant worry: what does your theory produce? The basic problem we must both solve is that of prolonging your life as far as possible. After all, is not this why you worry? But does your theory make a man live longer? Does your sinful, unbelieving anxiety resolve this basic problem of life? No, it miserably fails at the very point where it was supposed to work!"

Although Jesus did not mention it, as a matter of fact worry often shortens life through shattered nerves, stomach ulcers and heart attacks. These are often the result of constant worry which wears out of the mind and body, which distracts the attention from real sources of help, and which lessens the power of decision and pushes men gradually into a frustrating incapacity to deal with life.

D. THE ABSURDITY OF ATTEMPTING AN APPROACH TO AN ALLURING ARRAY OF ANEMONE (6:28-30a)

6:28 **And why are ye anxious concerning raiment?** This question is the principle point of Jesus' description of the field lilies, not the fact that they perform no work. **Consider the lilies of the field** (*ta krina tou agrou*). Just what flower Jesus indicates by this term is not known. Some think He meant the autumn crocus, the scarlet poppy, the Turk's cap lily, the anemone coronaria, the narcissus, the gladiolus or the iris. Perhaps Jesus had no particular flower in mind, but was thinking of the extremely beautiful flowers that adorn the Galilean fields. **How they grow:** this is the precise connection in which Jesus brings in the flowers to illustrate His point about worry concerning clothing. **They toil not, neither do they spin**, i.e. without wearying themselves through struggle and without spinning their first thread to make clothing, *they grow*. But they were not designed to do these tasks of which hard-working men and women are capable. They, like the birds, do those simple tasks assigned to them, and God takes care of the rest. This is the point: men were not designed to worry; they were designed to trust God and to *toil* and *spin* without anxiety.

6:29 **Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.** Solomon was without peer as Israel's wealthiest, most magnificently arrayed king. (Cf. I Kg. 10) The mention of Solomon's glory suggests a secondary lesson: your ideal is false and patently unattainable. Would you seek to clothe yourself in rich raiment? Solomon's class is still beyond you. But even if you had the wealth to put yourself on his level, one simple unworrying flower surpasses you and Solomon both! Thus, the struggle to put together lavish wardrobes must not become an obsession, since God is clothing flowers every year and we cannot compete with them for magnificence and beauty. Treasuring garments of great value is a false ideal because they are always rags when compared to the simplest flowers.

6:30a **But if God does so clothe the grass of the field.** How does God clothe them? His original fiat of creation has become God's continually operative word that has provided for the nature and sustenance of the *lilies and grass of the field*. (Cf. Gen. 1:11) Some call that word of God "natural law," but it is nonetheless God's care, no matter how we denominate it. **Which today is,**

and tomorrow is cast into the oven vividly describes the ephemeral nature of these little creatures who enjoy God's personal care. In a country long stripped of its forests and where fuel would be scarce, grass and stalks of all kinds would be thrown into the outdoor clay-brick ovens to heat the interior for baking bread. When the oven was sufficiently hot, the ashes of the burnt grasses were swept out and the dough was placed immediately on the heated floor of the oven.

But is Jesus considering the beautiful flowers and the grass together as being thrown into the oven? Naturally, they would be cut down together. If so, is He emphasizing their fleeting beauty, i.e. glorious flowers and refreshing grass in a desert country, or is He indicating their minor usefulness to heat the oven for baking bread?

1. If "fleeting beauty," perhaps He is saying, "In view of the brevity of life and the temporary nature of physical charm and the perishable quality of the most gorgeous garments, how baseless and foolish is pride over a handsome body and anxious concern for royal apparel!" (Cf. I Pet. 1:24; 3:3, 4)
2. If "minor usefulness," then He may be saying, "Man is of eternal usefulness to God, and if God is so concerned about so minor a creature as grass and flowers, will He neglect man who is to Him of infinitely greater value and enduring service? They are made but for a few days; God made man for eternity."

Shall he not much more clothe you. . . ? The same God who spoke into being that providential law for the clothing of grass and flowers, has also spoken His word of power to clothe man. Our God-given task is to do the work appointed for us (*toil* and *spin* of v. 28). It is by means of this work that He has ordained for us that He has chosen to provide for us. But concern for the unseeable and unknowable future is God's business, not ours. Therefore, worry is a contradiction of our nature, just as it is absurd when applied to flowers and grass.

E. AN ALARMING ACCUSATION (6:30b)

6:30b **O ye of little faith.** (Cf. Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Jas. 1:5-8) This is the most significant term of reproach Jesus ever used toward His disciples. In this context, their worry is a practical expression of infidelity because they distrust God for raiment. Jesus is proving decisively that theology and things defi-

nately affect each other. The same faith that trusts God for *grace* and guidance must also trust Him for garments and groceries. Man is all one piece: the less he trusts God for his temporal needs, the less he really believes in His eternal mercies, since the same faith is called upon to lay hold of both. (Study Dt. 8 and Mt. 4:1-11) Therefore, anxiety is not simply a human weakness that we may excuse of a trifle about which we need not get too excited. It is grave sin for which we must be pardoned, for it chokes out faith in God's word! (Cf. Mt. 13:22; Lk. 8:14)

F. ANXIETY IS AKIN TO ALIEN AGNOSTICISM AND ATHEISM
(6:31, 32)

6:31 **Be not therefore anxious.** This is a command of the Son of God, a command equal to any other which the disciple is called upon to obey, a test of allegiance just as surely as baptism or public testimony or any other demonstration of faithfulness to Jesus. It is more than just good advice which may be taken or left. *Therefore* emphasizes the relation of this command to the foregoing principles upon which the prohibition is based.

This anxiety shows itself in such questions as **What shall we eat?** or, **What shall we drink?** or, **Wherewithal shall we be clothed?** Many more questions might be added, but these fundamental ones cover a multitude of other worries. These are the very symptoms of distrustful people, the very complaints they make when they encounter losses or adversities befall them or their supply of necessities is apparently cut off, or when they lose their job or their investments do not pay off or they are stricken with some incapacitating disease. These very demands denote that they who ask them have no faith in God's goodness.

To study the life of Jesus is to find out how simple were His daily needs and how stern was His devotion to the doing of God's will, and such a study should shame us at the outrageous expense of our desires (Lk. 9:58)! Further, if worry about the necessities is sin, what would Jesus call our unjustifiable anxiety about those things that are not absolutely essential to existence and may be called luxuries? Wall-to-wall carpets, boats, color TV, second and third cars, household appliances, etc. There is nothing wrong with these things in themselves except that they are of this earth, and, being the objects of our straining and our loving care, they may well become our real god. (6:24)

6:32 For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. Worry is characteristic of heathen unbelief. Of what use then is all our religious orthodoxy and knowledge if we still act like those who never heard of our Father? How many of us are pagans in a crisis? How many are daring enough to bank their faith on God's character? Such distrust may be understandable in one who believes in a capricious, unpredictable god, but such conduct in a worshipper of our Father is totally incomprehensible. Another characteristic of pagans is that they think that they themselves must provide for all their needs without any dependable reference to the true God. There must be a marked difference in the practical affairs of Jesus' disciple that strikes a sharp contrast with the mentality of the world (Jn. 17:14; Ro. 12:2; Tit. 2:12).

For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Peter (I Pet. 5:7) puts it eloquently: "Cast all your anxieties upon Him, for He cares about you." Jesus has revealed God as one who knows and can never forget our smallest concern. If we accept Him as "Father" on this basis, worry becomes impossible, for to worry is to deny both the wisdom and knowledge of God and to doubt His love. Notice that Jesus puts the emphasis here: He does not call Him "God," in the sense of an omniscient Supreme Being who would be expected to *know* our need, but "Father," in the sense of one who both knows and *feels* our need.

Jesus is constantly trying to restore our proper perspective (Cf. notes on 6:22, 23): life does not consist in concern for the merely physical and sensual aspect of existence. Food, clothing and shelter are not man's greatest problems and must not sap his strength from his one main true obsession: kingdom righteousness.

G. THE APPROVED, ADEQUATE ANTIDOTE FOR ANXIETY (6:33)

6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. This is Jesus' positive answer to worry and covetousness, a program guaranteed to lead His followers into that peace of soul that only he can know who knows that he belongs to God. (Cf. Ac. 16:19-25; Ro. 14:17; Phil. 3:7-21) Barclay (I, 261) notes:

To concentrate upon the doing of, and acceptance of God's will is the way to defeat worry. . . . A great love can drive out every other concern. Such a love can inspire a man's

work, intensify his study, purify his life, dominate his whole being. . . . Worry is banished when God becomes the dominating power of our lives.

Seek first is an interesting command because Jesus does not say what to "seek second." He knows that He has nothing to worry about from the man who puts God's will first and who trusts God for all the rest. Marshall's pithy note (124) is quite apropos here:

Men are prone to put economic considerations first and to sacrifice moral principles for sake of their daily bread. The plea 'I must live' is often advanced as an excuse for unethical behavior. When business men argue that 'Business is business' they usually mean that it is exempt from ethical control . . . This word of Jesus is a call to moral heroism, to the high resolve to do that which is right in the sight of God whether it brings gain or loss, prosperity or adversity. Whatever happens, moral claims must be met first.

Seek first his kingdom, his righteousness, in too many ears, sounds like an impractical leap in the dark, an attack upon that which our common sense says we must believe, a despising of all earthly institutions upon which we so naturally rest our confidence, and the destruction of our false sense of property and security which so greatly hinders our spiritual development. In fact, Jesus intends that we get this impression, because He is hitting desperately hard at our dependence on things. Later, in His discussion of the dangers that confront His disciple (chapter 7), He will reiterate the exhortation to confide our needs to God (7:7-11) because of the constant danger of trusting something or someone else.

His kingdom means God's rule, His will. (See Notes on 6:10) *His righteousness* means seeking to be righteous on His terms. (See Introduction to the Sermon and the Notes on 5:17ff) God wants to give us the kingdom and all the benefits of His benign rule. (Cf. Lk. 12:32; see also on the Beatitudes) Why should we worry about all these other secondary matters? (Cf. Psa. 37:5; 55:22; 127:2; Prov. 16:3; I Pet. 5:7) *All these things shall be added unto you.* God knows we are not angels or machines, but men. (Psa. 103:13, 14) He knows that we must be provided for. So, to test our faith and to strengthen our hope He subjoins His faithful promise of blessing. But He has also willed that we work without worry, because undistracted labor produces rich fruits both in securing our daily needs

and in providing help for future needs both for ourselves and others (I Th. 4:10b-12; 5:14; II Th. 3:6-13; I Tim. 5:3-16; Eph. 4:28) On the other hand, those who ignore the Kingdom so that they can assure themselves of their life sustenance, will lose both the Kingdom and their life too! (Mt. 16:24-26)

H. ANXIOUS APPREHENSION ALWAYS ANTICIPATES ADDITIONAL ADVERSITY AND ATROPHIES ABILITIES (6:34)

6:34 Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. (Prov. 27:1; Lk. 12:19, 20; Jas. 4:14) Only when we learn to live one day at a time can we really stop worrying. (See on 6:11) Worry about tomorrow is the sin of presumptuousness, for to do so one must necessarily assume that God will give him a day that He has not promised. The worrier might not even live to see the next day and thus he will have sinned by taking out of God's hands a day that did not belong to him and never would exist for him.

Further, worry about the future tomorrows must ever suffer its own logical fallacies, its hypotheses contrary to fact. Tomorrow, by its very nature is an imaginary world, a handy word to describe the day that follows today. But tomorrow never comes, never exists. Every dawn brings another today with its problems, trials and difficulties geared to our capacity to deal with them within the dawn-to-dark limits of this day. (Cf. I Cor. 10:13; Heb. 3:12-14) The real future when it comes is rarely as bad as the tomorrow we had feared. Barclay (I, 263) observes:

We are still alive. Had someone told us that we would have had to go through what we have actually gone through, we would have said that it was impossible. The lesson of life is that somehow we have been enabled to bear the unbearable and to pass the breaking point without breaking.

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Jesus is using the word *evil* in the sense of "adversity, problems, troubles, trials and difficulties, not however without some flavor of "moral failure" mixed in. The point is this: we must not borrow trouble from tomorrow as if today did not have it already in sufficient quantity. Jesus is telling us that each day already has enough problems to solve and that we must not burden and hinder our effectiveness to solve them by adding other unreal worries.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between "treasures on earth" and "treasures in heaven?"
2. How does a "moth corrupt" earthly treasures?
3. What is the literal meaning of the word usually translated "rust" (*brósis*)? Following this literal meaning, what is made to disappear?
4. How do "thieves dig through"? Why? Explain this figure in its local setting.
5. In this section does Jesus prohibit prudent saving for the future of one's family? Prove your answer.
6. Explain the metaphor: "The lamp of the body is the eye."
7. Explain the allegory of the eye. What is meant by "the eye," "the body" which is illuminated by it? What kind of eye is "whole"? What kind is "evil"? What is intended by "the darkness that is in thee"? When is "thy body full of light"?
8. Why can we not "serve two masters"? Explain why a divided loyalty is so impossible and the attempt to serve both God and mammon so dangerous.
9. About what are we not to be anxious? (vv. 25, 31, 34)
10. Define "anxiety or worry" in such a way as to show why Jesus considered it so sinful.
11. How is it possible to use our "unrighteous mammon" to serve God? (Cf. Lk. 16:9-13)
12. What is the reason Jesus gives that we must "lay up treasure in heaven," and not on earth?
13. How does God "feed the birds," "array the lilies of the field" and "clothe the grass of the field"? What does this fact reveal about how He feeds and clothes us?
14. Why was Solomon mentioned? In what connection?
15. Why was grass "thrown into the oven"?
16. What "life" is more than the food? Does Jesus mean here our spiritual or our physical life?
17. List several reasons, stated by Jesus in this section, why anxiety is sin.
18. What is the point of each of the following figures Jesus used?
 - a. "Life is more than food and the body than raiment."
 - b. "Birds of the air."
 - c. "Add one cubit to the measure of one's life."
 - d. "Lilies and grass of the field."

e. "Gentiles seek all these things."

f. "Tomorrow will worry about itself."

19. What is "the kingdom" which we must seek first? What did this phrase mean to the audience who first heard it? What does it mean to us?
20. What is "His righteousness" which we must seek first? What does this word mean, when taken in the context of all that Jesus revealed about it in this Sermon on the Mount?
21. If we dedicate ourselves to putting the Kingdom and His righteousness first, who will be responsible for our necessities?
22. What kind of "evil" was Jesus talking about when He said, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"?
23. What are the great principles, taught in this section, which reveal the nature and genius of Jesus' religion?

CHAPTER SEVEN

F. THE DANGERS FACING THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)

1. THE DANGER OF HARSHLY CRITICIZING OTHERS.

(Mt. 7:1-5; Lk. 6:37-42)

TEXT: 7:1-5

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.
2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you.
3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me cast out the mote out of thine eye; and lo, the beam is in thine own eye?
5. Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is the connection of thought between the message of this seventh chapter and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount?
- b. What is a generally universal psychological trait in godly people that makes it necessary for Jesus to begin talking like this to them?
- c. What does John 8:7 have to do with the teaching of this passage, if anything?
- d. Why does Jesus call a man, who judges harshly, a hypocrite? In what does his hypocrisy show itself, according to Jesus?
- e. Must we be free from all faults before correcting others? Prove or explain your answer.
- f. What is the connection in which Luke introduces this passage? What does that connection prove about the meaning of this section?
- g. Why should Jesus have singled out harsh judgment as such an evil particularly to be avoided by His followers?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Stop criticizing others, so that you may not be criticized. For exactly as you judge others, you too will be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Make allowance for others and

they will make allowance for you; acquit and you will be acquitted. Give, and gifts will be given you. They will give you good measure: pressed down, shaken together and running over, they will pour into your pockets. By your standard of measure others will measure back to you.

Then He told them this illustration: "One blind man cannot lead another blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? Of course, they will. A student cannot rise above the level of his teacher. Rather, when his training is complete he will reach his teacher's level.

"Why are you looking at the tiny speck of dust that is in your brother's eye, but pay no attention to the girder that is in your own? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me get that speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is that great plank in your own? You hypocrite, first get that log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly how to take the speck out of your brother's!"

SUMMARY

Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. If he presents himself as a man of superior righteousness and carping critic of others, they will throw his merciless judgment back in his face, and God will also judge him according to the severity he used toward others. But if he judges with a merciful disposition to acquit and his personal generosity is obvious, others cannot do enough good to be generous to him. And God's mercifulness will certainly not be outdone toward such a man who has made allowances for others.

A man whose moral vision is warped is quite incapable of offering himself as the ethical teacher of others whose vision is also distorted. A man cannot teach any better than he himself is willing to be, with the natural consequence that his students, by following *his* instruction, rise no higher than the source of their moral education. Therefore, self-criticism is in order before criticism of others is even possible, much less allowable.

NOTES

Though it seem that the Lord is changing the subject rather abruptly, yet Luke's narrative (6:27-42) shows that the ideas of this chapter have a close logical connection with the principles that Matthew has introduced earlier (5:43-48). After having shown how perfection (5:48) is spoiled by hypocrisy (6:1-18), greed (6:19-24) and anxiety (6:25-34), Jesus now returns to the theme of love of one's neighbor

(5:43-48) by showing the fallacy of common censorious criticism of others (chap. 7). To Jesus, any religion which leads men to harsh judgment and scorn of others must necessarily be false, because of its lack of love and its legalistic self-righteousness. Nor can any correction of others be really an expression of love if it does not lead to real repentance. We are often tempted to prostitute our powers of discriminating judgment to harmful purposes rather than use them for helping others. So, after He preached against premature, unloving judgment, He balanced His instruction with a clever, proverbial antithesis (7:6), arguing that proper distinctions be made. Next He called upon His hearers to make a profound moral judgment regarding their dependence upon God (7:7-11), a step, incidentally, which ties the sixth and seventh chapters together. Jesus proceeded to urge the audience to judge themselves before judging others (7:12) and pointed out other critical areas where very exacting judgment must be exercised (7:13-27).

The connection of chapter seven with the rest of the Sermon is also a psychologically necessary one. Those who have attained a measure of growth in the character of Christ are tempted to criticize rather harshly those who have not attained to their measure of perfection. This is especially true if one is conscientious and sincere, because, what one hates in himself as a defect in character he notices more consciously in others. Such high standards mentioned in chapters five and six might cause men harshly to judge others who have not even completely understood them, to glory in their own superior holiness ("exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees") and to despise all others. (Cf. Lk. 18:9; Jn. 7:45-49) This is possible in spite of the fact that Jesus has, in various ways, hinted at the merciful grace of God and openly stated some of the ethical implications that must be operative in the life of the pardoned sinner (5:7, 45; 6:8, 12, 14, 15) Now He must make those implications explicit.

7:1 Judge not that ye be not judged. That this prohibition is evidence of Jesus' return to the subject of love, as shown by Luke's close connection (6:35-37), is clearer when the full command to love one's neighbor be heard (Lev. 19:15-18):

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor. Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people: neither

shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor: I am Jehovah. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am Jehovah.

Even the command to rebuke one's neighbor, rather than let him destroy himself, must be obeyed in the framework of love. Otherwise, the opposite effect is produced. Rather than lead him to see his own sin and repent of it, we cause him to start looking for our sins to judge us. But our responsibility for our neighbor requires that we form some opinion about his conduct. Therefore, let us see

1. What judgments Jesus does NOT intend to prohibit:

- a. It is not the ACT of judging in itself which is at stake here, but the SPIRIT of the judge, for Jesus later commands that judgment be made in many areas of life (7:12-27). He also immediately qualifies His prohibition with exhortations and prohibitions which touch only the spirit and attitude of the one who must judge (Lk. 6:36-38).
- b. This ban on judging is no easy-going tolerance of evil, for the Lord requires that we form an opinion about the conduct of others in light of all that He reveals about evil. He expects us to match conduct, both ours and others, against His standard. His word becomes the standard of judgment we must use.
- c. Nor can he mean the decisions of civil courts (Ro. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; I Pet. 2:13-15).
- d. He cannot mean the decision of the Church against sinning brethren (Mt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5:1-13; II Th. 3:6, 14; Tit. 3:10) nor the decision of brethren in private litigation (I Co. 6:1-8).
- e. He cannot mean anything that contradicts the plain commands to judge or the exhortations and information how to go about it. (Cf. Lk. 12:13b, 57; Jn. 7:24; Ro. 14:5, 13b; 16:17, 18; I Co. 2:2; 5; 6:2-5; 7:37; 10:15; 11:13; II Cor. 5:14, 16; 13:5f; Gal. 6:1-5; I Th. 5:21; I Tim. 5:22; Jas. 2:13; 5:19, 20; I Jn. 4:1-6)

Therefore, it is a pious hypocrite that many times advises others never to judge the other fellow, for he may be using the phrase, "Judge not . . ." as a protective smoke-screen to escape the valid conclusion of those who know the facts. After all, a dog or a pig or a wolf might subtly try to use this text to shield themselves from the exposure of their real character. But, a dog must be regarded as a dog and a pig as a pig, and they must not be mistaken for priests or pearl merchants! A wolf must be "dewooled" and must not be taken for one of the sheep. Judgment must be made. So what kind of judgment does Jesus mean to prohibit?

2. Jesus means only unmerciful criticism. Luke (6:36-38) records this prohibition in the context of personal mercifulness. (Cf. Jas 4:11, 12) The evil He forbids is condemnation based upon suspicion and surmises, insufficient evidence or upon unloving opinions or sheer ill will. He is talking about those judgments which are motivated by no real purpose to help the object of the criticism and which are more often nothing but smug self-righteousness. Jesus is hitting hard at the love of finding fault, that secret joy felt when one discovers another's failures, that strong inclination to find the neighbor guilty upon slight proof, that presumptuous investigation of motives and that hell-ignited desire to tell it.

To judge or criticize another is to put oneself in a position superior to, and removed from, the one he criticizes. But as long as we are men, we do not enjoy that privileged position. A critical spirit makes us hard, cruel and vindictive and, worse yet, quite convinced that we are indeed superior men. This spirit causes us to lose our right enthusiasm for people, permits us to admire none, stifles any spontaneous and whole-hearted approval we might have given, causes us to suspect every motive and depreciate everyone. Thus, our own life is inexorably exiled to our own small desert island of perfection.

7:2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:

and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you.

These two lines, spoken in Hebrew thought parallelism, mean the same thing. Censorious criticism provokes the one judged to retaliate by returning due retribution both in kind and quantity. Jesus has deliberately not named the one who will judge and give back equal

measure to the unrighteous critic, because this is an ethical principle that will be used against the critic by:

1. *God.* To judge implies a knowledge of the standard by which the judgment is given; knowledge of the standard requires perfect fulfillment of its requirements. (Ro. 2:1-5, 13, 17-24) Strict justice requires that every fault, every sin, every indiscretion be accounted for (Jas. 2:9-11), but mercy could waive the sentence (Jas. 2:13). Therefore, Jesus very clearly taught that our personal generosity and willingness to try to understand others' position will determine how the law of divine justice will be applied to us. (See Notes on 5:7; 6:12, 14, 15; cf. also 18:21-35, esp. 32, 33; Gal. 6:7; Prov. 26:27) Normally, God is so generous that He would not think of judging men by measure (Cf. Psa. 103:8-14), unless man self-righteously and unmercifully holds his brother to strict justice. In this case, God deals back judgment to the critic just as he dished it out to others: measure for measure. (Cf. Isa. 65:1-7) *It shall be measured to you* renders more acute the need for mercy, because it intensifies the severity of judgment, but, ironically, mercy is out of the question because of the unbending hypocrisy of the man who needs the mercy for himself but had never shown it to others. Who would dare stand up before God demanding to be judged just as he judged his fellows? If God judged us like that we would be in hell already! Even if we could be sure of being perfect in everything else, desiring to condemn others would damn us, because such a spirit is so far out of line with the character of a God who takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11) and desires that none perish but all come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

2. *Men.* We all tend to respond to the kind of treatment others give us, by paying them back in their own coin, whether it be love, appreciation and generosity, or whether it be lynx-eyed criticism, fault-finding and no more helpful service than is absolutely necessary. Luke (6:37, 38) graphically stimulates us to be open-hearted, understanding, forbearing and generous.

3. *Ourselves.* Worse yet, we deal out to ourselves what cruel depreciation we use against others. Those who are hypercritical of others, by a process of projection, believe that people are just as carpingly cynical of them. They are forced to beware of all others, feeling that others are looking at them with severely critical eyes. Such a feeling of tension is built up in them that they cannot relax.

With what standard they judge others, they thus judge themselves. A little mercy could break this vicious round of self-condemnation.

For these reasons we must grow skeptical of our best estimates of human character, because our decisions are so temporary, so fallible. Based on such incomplete data as they are, God may easily and justly reverse them completely. Humility on our part is what Jesus wants, because only thus could He save us from the conceit, hypocrisy and beastly self-righteousness involved in such a rebuke of others. (Cf. Ezra. 9:5-15; Neh. 1:4-7; Psa. 106:6; Isa. 6:5; Jer. 3:25; Dan. 9:3-20) The thought of facing the cruel sentences we have handed down to others should drive us to immediate repentance and confession of sin! "As you would that others should judge you, judge them accordingly."

7:3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? How can you even see (*blepeis*) the *mote*, that speck of sawdust, straw or anything significant, in another's eye and not even notice (*katanoëō*) the *beam*, or huge timber used as a beam or rafter, in your own? This humorous but pathetic scene Jesus describes is that of a man with a rafter sticking out of his eye who tries to get a good look at his brother's eye to remove something almost invisible. The Master emphasizes the ridiculous character of the hyper-critical censor who would condemn others without realizing or admitting his own failures. The lesson stings: he who has a serious and disgusting character fault but overlooks it and goes around offering his services to one who has some small fault is exactly what the Lord called him: *ahypocrite*. Jesus regards as one of the worst sins of the spirit the attitude of being intensely critical of others and, at the same time, without the least power of self-criticism.

Beams are any fault, any sin, any inconsistency with the truth, that hinders correct, righteous judgment. One of the biggest *beams* is one's inability to form a correct judgment. This is true because he usually possesses an attitude that disqualifies him for doing the best for those who are the objects of his criticism. Without self-knowledge and self-reform, one's work is but presumption not love. He is also disqualified because of the common but glaring failure to know all the facts in the case. (Cf. Jn. 7:24; I Tim. 5:24) Appearances are deceiving to us too. Some men's good and evil remain hidden to us, perhaps at the very moment when we are gathering our facts upon which our judgment will be based.

Another *beam* in our eye is the possibility of our condemning in others what is not really sin. Jesus and Paul were condemned for revealing God's true will as against the popular views. We will be castigated for our relation to Jesus. Eli misjudged Hannah (I Sam. 1:12f). Job's three friends had falsely accused him.

A third *beam* is the fact that we are not ever sympathetically aware of the strength of the temptations before which he has fallen, or the length of time our brother resisted without our help before he fell (Gal. 6:1-7; I Cor. 10:13) nor have we rightly considered how we would have reacted to that which felled him (I. Cor. 10:12).

Another *beam* may be our tendency to judge ourselves and others, not according to perfect justice, but by that standard which we ourselves have reached. Besides using a false standard, we only expose our ignorance and immaturity. (II Cor. 10:12, 18)

A fifth *beam* might be that our own faults and prejudices tend so to warp our judgment that what we see in this is but a projection of our own faults.

A *sixth* beam might be our presumptuous seizure of the divine prerogative, because the right of such censorship does not belong to us. (Ro. 14:10-13; I Cor. 4:3-5; II Cor. 5:10) It is a meddling in God's domestic affairs (Ro. 14:4).

Not the least, to be forgotten, is any sin about which the human judge seems so little concerned. *Considerest not* does not mean that the judge concealed his sin; it means that, for the moment, he had conveniently forgotten it. But is this really possible to a person who matches his imperfect brother up against the law which must certainly point out the critic's own faults? At best, the critic must pretend to be far better than he is, to be so pained by the presence of some trifling fault that he is forced by his sensitive conscience (which ignores his own sin!) to try to remove his brother's error. Many are zealous to convert the world when they are themselves yet unconverted. What is worse, they may be so completely blinded by their self-righteousness as to be perfect unaware of their true condition, feeling themselves to be sincere and right in lashing their neighbor.

7:4 How wilt thou say? What kind of brazenness does it require to adopt this patronizing tone of smug condescension! A classic case in point is the self-righteous elder brother (Lk. 15:25-30) who graphically portrayed the Pharisees and scribes (Lk. 15:1, 2). Jesus is not denying that the other brother did have *a mote in his eye*.

But He is more concerned with the impudence of the severe critic who would justify himself by claiming, "But I am just telling the truth; I am just calling them as I see them!" Jesus argues, "So what if it is true that he has a mote? How can you pretend to be qualified to remove it?"

Luke (6:39, 40) records two sparkling proverbs that Jesus used to illustrate this basic principle of judgment:

1. *Blind leading the blind: both fall into the pit.* Before offering our leadership to others, we must first examine our own conscience lest we be mere hypocrites who want to provide more direction to other sinners. In this context, this proverb has nothing to do with our being blind men who follow blind guides (as in Mt. 15:14), but with our being morally unqualified to be such guides as we pretend to be. The point is not: "Beware of blind leadership," but "Beware of giving blind leadership."

2. *Disciple not above teacher, but when perfected will be like him.*

Plummer (*Luke*, 190) notes: Disciples will not get nearer the truth than the teacher goes, and therefore teachers must beware of being blind and uninstructed, especially with regard to knowledge of self . . . The disciple will not excel his master; at the best he will only equal him. And, if the master has faults, the disciple will be likely to copy them.

7:5 **Cast out first.** Consistency requires this first step. But before we can cast out that which hinders our vision and judgment, we must retreat in shame and embarrassed confusion, confessing that the beam is there. We must arrive at the point where we admit: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner that I am! I have sinned!" This confession of sin, when truly and deeply felt, psychologically prepares us to be fitter judges, because it restores our humility, our knowledge and fear of personal failure and destroys our cocksure self-righteousness. The more critical we are of ourselves, the more merciful we will tend to be toward the failures of others, but the one who feels he is so good as to need little mercy from God, will have but meager compassion for others. As Jesus observed elsewhere (Lk. 7:36-50), the ability to love may be in direct proportion to how much we think we need forgiveness. But if we admit that God has forgiven and helped us remove our greater fault, we can never despair of anyone, for God is able to make him stand. (Ro. 14:4)

And then thou shalt see clearly to cast out. Jesus has never denied, but rather here reaffirms, the necessity to form a critical opinion about a brother which may issue in a rebuke of his sins. True love for him absolutely demands that he be helped by such an admonition (see on 7:1), but he who so admonishes him must proceed from an entirely different spirit, and when painfully conscious of personal weaknesses, will actually do so.

This section is an important context in which to study Jesus' warnings about false prophets (7:15-19), because a man whose own life is not in order is in no position to unmask the falsity of the other. When the glaring failures of a Christian are put up beside the conduct and character of a false prophet, the false prophet always gains by the comparison. Detection of the false prophet becomes even more difficult when he is camouflaged by the inconsistencies of the flock. But were every true disciple of Jesus living in a state of constant repentance and conduct consistent with their confession, the false would become more readily noticeable by contrast.

Again this section is humbling to those who must judge the false prophets, because Jesus does not intend to reveal the sin and unbelief of the false prophet in order to make His disciples self-righteous and smugly satisfied with their orthodoxy. They must never arrive at the point where, even with respect to a false teacher, they say, "Thank God, I am not like him!" They must ever recall that there, but for the mercy of God, stand they.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List at least 10 NT passages which require that a Christian, to be faithful and obedient to God, make judgments, and which tell him how to make such judgments.
2. What limitations are placed on the prohibition against judging, by these passages listed above?
3. What kind of judging is actually forbidden?
4. Who will "judge us as we have judged others"?
5. What additions to Jesus' general discussion of judging does Luke record, and what point are these additions intended to convey? In what connection does Luke introduce them? How does this connection help to get at Jesus' meaning, even as it is introduced by Matthew?
6. What is a "mote" and a "beam"? What is the meaning that they are intended to convey in Jesus' comic representation?

7. Explain the connection between this section and what Jesus has to say about false teachers.
8. Does Jesus, in this section, admit the necessity to judge a brother? If so, under what conditions?

F. THE DANGERS FACING THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)

2. THE DANGER IN FAILING TO DISCERN IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES.

TEXT: 7:6

6. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Would Jesus call a man a "dog," or a "hog"? Are not these terms usually used as despisingly derogatory terms? Then, how is it that God's Son can mean these words?
- b. What is the connection of this little allegory with the general subject of judging others and being judged?

PARAPHRASE

"Do not give what is holy to dogs nor feed your pearls to swine, lest they only trample them underfoot and turn on you to tear you to pieces."

SUMMARY

Some men have no appreciation for what belongs to God; others have no sense of values. Therefore, do not intrust them to them, lest they not only despise them but also ungratefully attack you for having been so optimistic about their real character and reaction.

NOTES

Even though Jesus specifically stated that after personal self-criticism one might help his brother (7:5), yet with the warning against self-righteous judgments ringing in their ears, the audience might yet think that ALL judgment is wrong and they must never

condemn anyone. Thus, from one extreme attitude of criticizing everyone, they might fly to the opposite pole of refusing to discriminate in any case. Here, then, the Lord is balancing the scales: "You must judge, yes, but with a well-tempered sense of discernment."

7:6 This is another example of Hebrew poetic thought, expressed in an inverted parallelism:

A: Give not that which is holy unto the dogs,

B: Neither cast your pearls before the swine,

B: Lest haply they trample them under their feet,

A: And turn and rend you.

The thoughts of the first and last members are connected, while those of the two middle members are harmonious. This proverb, because of the thought parallels, is saying just one thing that is expressed by (1) *dogs* and *swine*; (2) *the holy* and *your pearls*; and (3) *trampling underfoot* and *turning to rend*. The literal meaning of this allegory is simple: "Do not persist in offering what is sacred or of value to those who least appreciate it, because your gift would be not only contaminated or despised, but also your generosity would be rebuffed if not openly attacked."

But, it will be asked, why did Jesus choose this proverbial form in order to convey such a simple message—could He not have stated exactly what He meant in literal language? One answer would be, yes, but by stating His message in this proverbial version He rendered it more vivid and memorable. Yes, but why should He choose this particular proverb and talk about "dogs and swine"?

Does Jesus mean this proverb to be a simple illustration in which only the main point is to be gathered without identifying each point? If so, He is saying, "Just as any sensible person would not feed sacrificial meat to dogs nor offer pearls to swine by virtue of their unappreciative nature, even so a sensible person would be able to make proper distinctions between those who would not understand important differences and those who would."

But if Jesus means the problematic proverb as an allegory with more than one point to be interpreted, then one must seek to identify each point of the proverb with some reality in the context which it is supposed to illuminate, clarify or illustrate. If so, the *dogs* and *swine* are men, just as the wolves are men. (v. 15) But what is there about *dogs* and *swine* that is like men, that renders them com-

pletely unaware of the value of holiness of that which might be offered them? *Dogs* were the garbage-disposal units of Palestine, the scavengers of the day. (Ex. 11:7; 22:31; I Kg. 14:11; 16:4; 21:19, 23, 24; 22:38; II Kg. 9:10, 36; Psa. 68:23) However some were, of course, tamed (Mt. 15:26; Mk. 7:28) and worked (Job 30:1; Isa. 56:10, 11). In their character as fierce, half-famished animals that ran in packs, they have been used to symbolize the treachery of the wicked (Psa. 22:16; 59:6, 14, 15). Not only being unclean animals (see Lev. 11), their habits provided a pictorial euphemism for a homosexual person (Dt. 23:17, 18; cf. Rev. 22:15). To Jews, this figure is strikingly significant as referring to the dog's indiscriminate eating of meat, whether the filth and refuse of the street or the consecrated sacrifices of the temple (*that which is holy*; cf. Lev. 6:24-30; 7:15-21).

Swine, also unclean (Lev. 11:7, 8; 14:8; Isa. 65:4; 66:3, 17) have also been used as a symbol of a person without proper discretion (Prov. 11:22). *Your pearls* might symbolize anything of value to man, but which *swine* would be, by nature, totally incapable of appreciating, hence *would trample them under their feet* as if they were common gravel.

Jesus did not define the terms, *that which is holy* or *your pearls*, to mean "gospel privileges," as many commentators do. What Jesus said may have been much more general than this one application, although it would certainly include it.

Dogs and *swine*, then, are obdurate, perverse men who have abandoned all moral restraints and who, because of that attitude, are incapable of appreciating the blessings of the holy or its value, or those who, after they have once arrived at an appreciation of spiritual values, retain their vicious, filthy nature. (Cf. Heb. 6:4-6; 10:29; II Pet. 2:20-22)

In short, the teaching of the proverb is clear: One MUST make proper distinctions: practical estimates are absolutely necessary. For even if *dogs* and *hogs* are without discernment of the holy and valuable, he who must deal with them must not be!

But in the dealing with people, it is not always possible to tell at first what manner of character it is with which one must deal. This however becomes quite evident when they begin to show disregard for the pricelessness of what is offered them, or when they turn to attack the one who would bless them. The NT is replete with examples of applications of this basic idea of Jesus:

1. Jesus' dealing with the crowds who clamored for more loaves and fishes (Jn. 6:26) and were failing to discern the really important Bread of Life who would feed them. Rather than continue to feed them, He preached them that sermon which scattered the ones unwilling to accept Him.
2. Jesus' refusal to give additional signs to those who would not accept previous miracles and their relative revelations (Mt. 16:1-4). Similarly, Jesus' refusal to perform for Herod (Lk. 23:8, 9).
3. Jesus' command to move on to other cities when some would not receive the apostle's message (Mt. 10:11-14). Paul's practice (Ac. 13:44-52; 18:5-7).
4. Paul's treatment of Elymas Bar-Jesus (Ac. 13:4-12).
5. Peter's dealing with Simon Magus (Ac. 8:9-24).
6. Paul's declaration concerning those who slanderously charged him (Ro. 3:8) or brought another gospel (Gal. 1:8, 9). But look at Paul's attitude as he tried to enter the theater of Ephesus (Ac. 19:30, 31) and tried to win the mob at Jerusalem (Ac. 22:1-21) and the court of Agrippa (Ac. 26).
7. Paul's instructions concerning the choice of elders and deacons (I Tim. 3:1-13) and his warning not to give these holy offices to unworthy candidates (I Tim. 5:19-24).

As is seen elsewhere in the character of the persons who made these judgments, careful discernment was required before they concluded that the persons with whom they were dealing were *bogs* or *dogs*. Therefore, before we arrive at this judgment, let us be as full of hope, love and mercy as was God when He was dealing with us. This careful judgment is imperative to keep us from treating men as if they were altogether beyond hope or too sinful to be saved. We must remember that God has transformed men who were often more brutal and more stubborn than we. On the other hand, we must remain on the alert because of the forces of wickedness that are working in human hearts. But just because a man has once rejected the gospel does not necessarily mean that he is therefore to be branded a *dog*. There is often a hair-splitting distinction between the point at which we are to "compel men to come in" (cf. Lk. 14:23) and the point at which we must cease expending our energies to extend the gospel privileges and our fellowship to those who are so

perverse and profane as not to have any appreciation or concern for what God is offering them. (See Eph. 4:17-18) But the obvious key to the solution is repentance and fruit (Cf. Mt. 18:15-18: if he refuses to be converted after much loving, persistent effort, he is a dog.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is "that which is holy"?
2. What are "your pearls"?
3. Are they to be distinguished as two separate ideas in Jesus' meaning?
4. What are "dogs"? List other Biblical references to "dogs" that may help to understand that to which Jesus makes reference.
5. What are "swine"? List other Biblical references to "swine" that may help to clarify Jesus' choice of their mention.
6. What is it to "give what is holy to dogs"?
7. Is this to be distinguished from "casting pearls before swine"? If so, how so? If not, why not?
8. What is meant by the "trampling under their feet"?
9. What is meant by the act of "turn and rend you"?
10. Which animal is likely to do each of the above-mentioned deeds?
11. What Hebrew poetic figure is this allegory?

F. THE DANGERS FACING THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)

3. THE DANGER OF FAILING TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S PROVISION.

TEXT: 7:7-11

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;
8. for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
9. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him a loaf, will give him a stone;
10. or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent?
11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did Jesus use so many words for praying to God for something? ("Ask . . . seek . . . knock") Would not is have been much simpler merely to say: "Pray, and God will answer you"? What, then, is suggested by this variety of words?
- b. Jesus has been talking about judging others and discerning important differences. Why did He change the subject—or did He? If He did not, what is the connection between this section and the general subject of judging?
- c. What if we ask for the wrong thing, in the wrong way or for the right thing but for the wrong motive? (7:7-11) Will God give to us, help us to find and open to us?
- d. Does Jesus really mean "every one" in verse 8, that is, just *anyone* who prays? If so, how? If not, why not?
- e. What is the point of comparing God to a human father? What good could be accomplished by doing that?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Keep on asking, and your prayer shall be granted. Keep on searching, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. After all, they who receive are the ones who keep asking, and they who find are the ones who keep searching, and the door is opened to him who keeps knocking. Or, if his son ask for some bread, no father among you would give him a stone, would he? Or if he ask for some fish, he would not give him a snake, would he? Or should he ask for an egg, would he give him a scorpion? No! Therefore, if you, despite your wickedness, know how to provide good gifts for your children, how much more likely it is that your heavenly Father give good things, yes, and the Holy Spirit too, to those who are asking Him!"

SUMMARY

We must pray constantly, persistently and with determination; only thus will we receive what is needed. A human father would not cheat his child, because he knows what is good for him. God our heavenly Father can much more surely be trusted to provide what is good for us, if we ask Him.

NOTES

Why does Jesus bring up prayer at this point in His paragraph on judging? At first, any connection seems vague. But the connection is God's grace, because prayer, by its very nature, admits one's dependence upon God on the basis of His continuing mercy. But he who is dependent upon God for all His gifts, especially for pardon, is hardly in a right position to be the carping critic of his peers. If so, Jesus is saying, "Consider how God is dealing with you; treat your neighbor likewise."

Lenski (292) notes another close connection, that is, although Jesus has admonished us to judge ourselves, we must never doubt or mistrust our true relation to God. Although we must severely analyze our own souls, we must never question the fact that, despite all our character failures, God has made us His children and He is ever ready to bless us with all we need.

Again, this section may be the practical application of all that Jesus said (in 6:19-34) about dependence upon God. These exhortations have been put in this section instead of that because failure to trust God is a failure to distinguish one's true Source of blessing and supply from only apparent sources. Thus, even prayer is an evidence of the necessity for intelligent discrimination and moral judgment.

7:7 (Cf. Lk. 11:9-13) **Ask . . . seek . . . knock.** These three words, all of which are present imperative indicating continuing action, suggest an increasingly unrelenting insistence in prayer. Luke (11:5-8) notes how Jesus definitely connected this teaching with exhortations to keep praying. *Ask* is the simple prayer that indicates the dependence of the petitioner upon God, and his consciousness of his need. (Cf. Mt. 6:14, 15; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 14:13; 15:17; 16:23, 24; Jas. 1:5-8; 5:16-18; I Jn. 3:22; 5:14) But those who ask for themselves, in order that they might continue to rule in their own sovereignty, will never receive from God, for they have not really acknowledged their dependence upon Him. (Jas. 4:3, 4; cf. Lk. 18:9-14) *Seek* suggests the personal effort of the one who prays to do his part toward getting his own prayers answered. (Cf. Isa. 55:6) It also suggests concentration, through prayer, of all of one's powers upon the realization of what is prayed. *Knock* savors of perseverent importunity despite difficulties and hindrances, a vital factor in effective prayer. God does not always answer our

request upon the first two or three utterances of it, probably to test our seriousness, to prepare us to receive it, and to work out the combination of circumstances and of persons necessary to its answer. (Lk. 11:5-13; 18:1-8; Gal. 6:9) Illustrations of "knocking" are: Abraham (Gen. 19:22-23); Jacob (Gen. 32:26); Elijah (Jas. 5:16-18); Jesus (Lk. 22:44); the Syrophenician woman (Mt. 15:21-28); the early Church (Ac. 12:5).

7:8 For every one that asketh receiveth. At first hearing, this phrase seems to open the channels of promised answers to prayer to anyone who would call upon God. Jesus is talking to Jews who, of course, already enjoyed a privileged relationship to God. Thus, to them and even to others, Jesus' word becomes a great invitation to unburden their hearts before the Father. But Jesus is not committing God to honor the blasphemies of those who flout His commands and refuse His Lordship. Jesus has already qualified the kind of prayer that is acceptable (6:5-15; also cf. Jas. 1:6, 7; 4:3; I Jn. 5:14, 15). Thus, this "whosoever will" refers to those who are willing to commit themselves to seeking first God's kingdom and the kind of righteousness that Jesus is preaching (6:10, 33). **Receiveth . . . findeth . . . to him it shall be opened.** God always keeps His promises (Cf. Dt. 7:9; Josh. 21:45; I Kg. 8:56; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4) but He would have us toil in prayer to get what we desire. Blessings that would come too easy or cost us nothing would ruin our appetite, dull our sensitivity and would give us what we wanted before we had been driven to our highest longing and most noble efforts to attain them.

7:9-11 Next, Jesus asks a series of rapid-fire rhetorical questions not only to arouse individual interest, stimulate curiosity and draw attention to the conclusion which follows, but also to draw out of His hearers a moral decision. Here again Jesus shows His followers that they are constantly making moral judgments, and already have a conscience about certain things, even in the most simple family situations.

7:9, 10 **Or what man is there of you, who if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent?** Luke (11:12) adds: "or a scorpion for an egg?" Each of Jesus' questions in Greek begins and *mé*, the negative which expects a negative answer: "No, he

would not." A human father would not mock his children's request by giving what is useless, unclean or positively harmful. Natural parental affection requires that a father give what is needed. This is a human judgment that is deeply felt and rightly arrived at. Upon it Jesus will base His argument.

It might well be wondered whether these heart-touching questions are not echoes of Jesus' thought when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. (Cf. Mt. 4:2-4) Even if not, the same logic of heroic faith is in the conclusion which Jesus offers.

7:11 Ye know how to give good gifts unto your children. This is the right conclusion to the rhetorical questions Jesus posed. **If ye, being evil:** in what sense does Jesus intend this to describe the audience? Probably in the relative sense, because there were undoubtedly some of the earth's finest people present that day. But in relation to God, they were yet *wicked* by comparison. They were imperfect, sometimes unwise, sometimes partial, sometimes fickle toward their children. But God is always wise and helpful. *Being evil* is Jesus' judgment upon us: it must humble us and it is a judgment that will keep us from pronouncing self-righteous judgments upon others. Although Jesus calls us *wicked*, He would have us remember that we are, for all our unworthiness, still God's beloved children. Again, at this critical point, Jesus calls God "your heavenly Father." (See notes on 5:45, 48; 6:1, 8, 26, 32) Whoever believes all that Jesus has revealed about the Father and believes that God is all that the word "Father" conveys, cannot but pray, knowing that his Father will be better and kinder than the most tender parents, and will give him what is truly best. **How much more?** is an argument from the lesser to the greater and a call for a moral judgment.

He will give good things to them that ask him. Jesus does not promise that He will always or necessarily grant the thing we ask, but what He judges to be *good* for us. (Cf. II Cor. 12:7-10; Jas. 1:16; Psa. 84:11) Too often we are blinded by the seeming desirability of earth's treasures. How shocked we would be to learn how often we have asked God for *stones, serpents and scorpions*, being deceived into thinking they would contribute to our happiness! (Cf. I Tim. 6:9, 10)

Yes, Jesus invites us to *ask*, to *seek*, to *knock*. He is offering us the key to God's wealth! Therefore, whose fault is it if we are poor, miserable and hungry? (Jas. 4:2c)

But we must be careful about reversing Jesus' argument by deciding that our attitudes and actions toward our children automatically commit God to react the same way towards us. Too easily we forgive our children when they do wrong; too often we do not enforce our word and fail to punish in cases where they definitely did need it. To suppose that our heavenly Father would do nothing that we parents would do is to ignore His plain declarations to the contrary. He has definitely declared that He will disinherit those who were once His children, who, as time went by, gradually drifted away into sin and died in that condition. (Cf. 13:41, 42; 8:12; 22:11-13; 24:45-51; 25:30; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:12-14; 4:1, 11; 6:9-12) The concept of eternal punishment for unforgiven sins, in whomever they may be found, is God's idea, and man is a fool to argue with Him about it.

What would be the result of such praying as Jesus describes here?

1. There would be no censorious judging done (7:1-5); more humility.
2. There would be wisdom to make right judgments and be good judges of character. (Cf. Jas. 1:5-8; 7:6, 15-20)
3. There would be no foolish dependence upon earthly wealth (6:19-34)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What Scriptural limitations are there which restrict the seemingly unlimited character of Jesus' promise of answer to prayer?
2. What is meant by the three different words denoting prayer (7:7, 8)?
3. Why would Jesus use so many expressions? Would not a simple command to pray be sufficient?
4. Explain the connection between the possibility of a son's asking for a loaf of *bread* and the father's giving him a *stone*. And why mention a *fish* in connection with a *serpent*? What is the connection?
5. What is the logical structure of Jesus' argument based on the comparison between a human father and God?
6. In what sense does Jesus intend to call His disciples "evil"? (v. 11)
7. What is the contextural connection between this section and the general topic under study: "judging one's fellows"?

finest efforts of the most zealous scholars, and no Christian could ever be sure of remembering all that Jesus said on any one single case. But Jesus relieved the necessity for such an exhaustive and exhausting statement of all the intricacies of human behavior by giving this simple, all-inclusive guide to conduct that can be applied in any society and in any era of human history.

It has been noted by many scholars that a maxim similar to the Golden Rule is to be found among the teachings of some of the world's greatest sages. This fact has been interpreted by some to mean that Jesus' rule is not so original and unique after all. A closer examination of that maxim, however, reveals its typically human origin because it rises no higher than those reflective men themselves. Among the western philosophers there was Socrates and Aristotle among the Greeks; among the oriental sages, Buddah and Confucius; among the Jews the great Hillel. Basically, these all had said: "What you would not have done to yourself, do not do to others." But this is merely the dictum of selfishness, the expression of an egotistic prudence that withholds injury from another lest the other return the injury. This negative statement is not so foreign to the calculating done by the selfish, because it is easily arrived at by anyone who must come to terms with his society in order to protect himself out of self-interest.

Another expression of selfishness that sometimes appears in connection with this Golden Rule is that mental calculation which practices Jesus' words with an ulterior motive: "Whatever you would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, so that they will be kindly disposed to do unto you what you wanted in the first place!" This beastly egotism finds no support in Jesus' meaning, for consideration of others, not self, is His intention.

For all our sincerity and knowledge of human nature, many times we are ignorant and confused as to where our duty lies. But if we would really love and serve our neighbor as ourself, we will have to learn to put ourselves in his place. Or, as Marshall (108) puts it, we must have a "sympathetic imagination" in order to visualize what we must do for him. This mental changing of places has a way of clearing away our prejudices and selfishness which keep us from seeing our objective duty toward him.

Do unto others. Jesus demands positive social action. He has no use for that self-complacency which is harmless, negative goodness that does nothing wrong, but never does any good either. To Jesus, omission to be helpful is sin! (Cf. Lk. 10:39-37; Jas. 4:17) Jesus

can acknowledge no ethic as genuine that does not inspire a man to be useful or of positive benefit to his fellows. Therefore, Jesus' positive dictum commissions us to get busy! We must express to our neighbor all that good that we would have him express to us.

To us, the final test of our actions and motives is not "What would Jesus do?" because that test too often devolves into an ignorant hypothesis contrary to fact. The more practical test of our social motivation is our own desire to be treated well. Jesus commands us to exchange positions with our neighbor and do for him in his position what we would have him do for us in ours. And, to our surprise, we have discovered what Jesus would have done in our case. But we arrived at this conclusion, not by supposition of what He might have done, but by application of His Rule which determines what we should do.

This handy little rule is not a mere ethical device which happily resolves all social problems, for later Jesus reveals that we will be judged on this rule alone. (Cf. Mt. 25:31-45; cf. Jn. 5:29; Ro. 2:6-11; Jas. 1:22-27; 2:14-17; I Jn. 3:14-17)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is the connection of the Golden Rule to the general contextual topic of judging one's neighbor, be he afflicted with a mote in the eye, or be he a dog or a swine, or a false prophet, or a self-deceived disciple?
2. What is the connection of the Golden Rule with the larger context of the entire Sermon on the Mount?
3. In what connection does Luke bring up the Golden Rule? How does this application of it in that way help us to understand its meaning and application, even as introduced by Matthew?
4. Is the Golden Rule unique to Christianity as an ethical rule of conduct? What parallels to it are there in other ethical systems or religions?
5. Are there any significant differences between the Golden Rule, as Jesus stated it, and the parallels seen in these other systems? If so, of what importance are these differences?
6. In what sense is the Golden Rule "the Law and the prophets"? What is meant by the phrase "the Law and the prophets"?
7. Cite other NT teaching which further illustrates or amplifies Jesus' rule of conduct given in the Golden Rule.

F. THE DANGERS FACING THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)

5. THE DANGER OF CHOOSING THE WRONG WAY OF LIFE.

TEXT: 7:13, 14

13. Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby.
14. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Jesus speaks of the road to Life through the narrow gate as found by only a few, while He declares that the road to Ruin through the wide gate is heavily travelled. Is this a hint of Jesus' expectations concerning the outcome of Christian evangelizing clear down to the end of time?
- b. How does Jesus intend for His disciples to regard this statistically negative picture which He paints in the words "many will be destroyed but a few will enter life"? In other words, why would He say this to those who would be His disciples?
- c. How did these relative percentages of humanity get to be this way? Can the percentages be changed? If so, how? If not, why not?
- d. Does the low figure concerning those who enter into life represent a numerical defeat for God? Explain your response.
- e. Why do you suppose Jesus describes the road to Life as through a "narrow gate" and of restricted passage? Did God want it to be that way so only a few *could* pass that way? Or so that few *would* go there? Or is the road straitened because the nature of what God expects of saints makes it that way?

PARAPHRASE

"Enter in by the narrow gate, because the wide gate opens upon a super-highway that leads to destruction. Many are they who are entering in by it. But the narrow gate opens onto a narrow, confined road that leads to life. Only a few are even finding it."

SUMMARY

Many are called but few accept God's invitation. The majority of humanity will be lost. Therefore, choose well which decision you will make!

NOTES

7:13 The figure that Jesus uses is that of two final destinations under the form of two cities, "Destruction" and "Life." Each city has a gate by which it is entered: one is wide and the other, narrow. Each city is approached by a road: one broad, the other restricted of passage.

Note that, for Jesus, there are only these two possible choices as live options, and as truly as any natural law, His word divides men into these two groups every time. (Cf. Mt. 12:30; 13:18-23, 38, 49; 25:32, 33) **Enter in by the narrow gate.** The emphasis is not on the entering, as opposed to remaining outside since all of humanity is regarded as entering one gate or the other. Rather, the emphasis is upon the choice of the right gate. In light of the final destination of each of the two roads, the critical question is which gate to choose and the necessity of choosing with discernment. The sad reality about the multitudes is that so many seek only the broad entrance and the easy passage without a thought regarding the final destination of the road!

Wide is the gate, and broad the way. Some suggest that the terms *wide* and *broad* are intended to suggest that travelling this route permits the following of one's own inclinations, doing as one pleases and that the inviting breadth of the road promises greater liberties. However, Jesus may be only saying, "It is the easiest thing in the world to destroy oneself, and the majority of the world's people are doing just that." **Many are they that enter in thereby.** Here is another clue to the impending difficulties of Christian discipleship. (Cf. 5:10-12) This is a veiled warning that one must be prepared to go against convention, custom and the crowd, and be different even if it means walking alone. Men must not take their moral cue from others, because they too may be lost. Many will be destroyed who did not believe themselves on the *broad way*. Later Jesus will further illustrate these two basic divisions of humanity under the two parables of the two sons (Mt. 21:28-32; Lk. 15:11-32). The chief priests and elders of the Jews imagined that surely they of all people must certainly enter into life because of their superior

religiosity. Hence they scorned the "tax collectors, harlots and other sinners." But Jesus intends for us to see that the *broad way* is travelled just as much by the aristocratic elite because of their selfishness, unthankfulness, hauteur and inhumanity, just as much as by the vulgar throng.

Destruction (*opoleia*) describes the disintegration of all that was deemed important in the lives of the wicked. All of that for which they spent their lives was nothing but dust and ashes. They stand before the great judgment without friends, without influence, without wealth, without character—morally bankrupt in every respect. Here is the wretchedness of a wasted life, the necessary conclusion to every life lived out of harmony with the will of God. Jesus is revealing this fact as one who knows what He is talking about: He does not argue the point or try to demonstrate it. He presents Himself as one who knows perfectly the issues of life, lived either for God or for self. Perhaps He is picturing Himself as standing at the fork of the two roads, speaking in omniscient mercy, "Enter ye in by the narrow gate!"

Is fear a proper motive for obedience? Yes, for as Trench (*Parables*, 174) notes:

This fear does not exclude love, but is its true guardian; they mutually support one another; for while it is true that motives drawn from gratitude and love must ever be the chief incentives to obedience (Rom. xii. 1), yet so long as our hearts are not made perfect in love, we must be presented with others also.

7:14 Narrow is the gate and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life and that path gets the most wear along the edges! Some suggest that the terms *narrow* and *straitened* have reference to the difficulty of travel toward Life, a fact easily verified. (Cf. Mt. 10:34-39; Lk. 14:25-33; Jn. 16:33; Ac. 14:22; I Th. 3:3) Counting the cost of discipleship requires much long-range discernment, which is another important act of judging. It requires effort, sacrifice and self-surrender to enter into Life. (Cf. Mt. 19:16-22)

And few are they that find it. There is certainly no easy optimism in this sad declaration of Jesus. Jesus intends this statistically negative picture as a frank warning that makes His disciples realists who know what to expect in His service. He would have them make their decision wisely. The exuberant Messianic enthusiasm

of the masses that surrounded Jesus must not turn the head of those who were serious about their commitment to Jesus' ideals. But is this declaration His practical estimate regarding the actual percentage of men who will finally be saved? Another man asked the Master this same question. (See Lk. 13:23f) But the Master considered it an idle question and answered thus: "You must struggle to get in by the narrow gate, because many, I tell you, will try to get in and they will not be able!" Our obedience is more important than our knowing whether those who are saved be many or few! (But see also Mt. 22:14; 18:8; 24:12, 13; Lk. 18:8.)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the allegory of the Two Gates and Roads. First, explain the imagery adopted: what is the picture Jesus has in mind? Then, give the meaning behind the symbols.
2. List other Scriptures which teach the same message of these two basic divisions in the human race. List also those Scriptures which describe the principles on which this division is based.
3. What is meant by "life"?
4. What is meant by "destruction"?

F. THE DANGERS FACING THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)

6. THE DANGER OF BEING LED ASTRAY BY FALSE PROPHETS.
(Parallel: Lk. 6:43-45)

TEXT: 7:15-20

15. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.
16. By their fruits ye shall know them. Do *men* gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.
18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.
19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
20. Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What are the logical premises back of Jesus' warning against false prophets?
- b. Does the "sheep's clothing" disguise of the false prophet refer to his character or his doctrine? or both? How do you know?
- c. Why do you suppose Jesus chose the particular test of a false prophet that He did?
- d. If a "corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit," how do you explain the good deeds that appear in the lives of obviously wicked men?
- e. Is Jesus making a precise and unvarying observation in verse 18, or is He making a relative, general statement which may admit of some exception?
- f. Jesus speaks of burning fruitless trees, but He means men, of course. Do you think it is right that God should destroy any of His creatures? If so, why? If not, why not?
- g. When Jesus spoke of "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit," about whom was He talking? Is this a specific or a general reference, i.e. only to false prophets, or to men in general?
- h. Do you think that Jesus' mention of burning corrupt, fruitless trees is a threat? Explain.
- i. Do you think that Jesus' disciples should be afraid of false prophets if their manifest intentions are such that they may be described as hungry wolves? If so, in what sense should they fear them? If not, why not?
- j. Why do you suppose that Jesus repeated the principle test of a false prophet ("By their fruits ye shall know them")?
- k. Do you think that we, as the flock of God, are in danger of infiltration by false prophets today? What makes you think so? Are there many false prophets around any more?

PARAPHRASE

"Watch out for false prophets: they will come to you under the guise of sheep, but at heart they are savage wolves. You will recognize them by the fruits of their lives. People do not gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles, do they? Well, every good tree yields good fruit, but the worthless tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is as incapable of yielding bad fruit as a worthless tree is unable to produce fine fruit. Every tree that fails to bear fine

fruit is cut down and burned up. That is why I say; you will recognize them by what their lives produce. A good man produces good things from the good stored up in his heart, and a wicked person brings forth evil things from his own stores of evil. A man's words will generally express what fills his heart."

SUMMARY

False leaders will hypocritically attempt to infiltrate the flock of God, but their overall conduct will give them away. Character and conduct are the final tests of any life and the surest test of any false leader. Though motives many times can never be known, the clear evidence of one's deeds is a sure indication of the nature of his heart.

NOTES

How is the narrow gate and the right way (7:13, 14) to be found? The transition, therefore, is a natural one from the two critical ways from which to choose, to the guides who propose to lead the disciples. Judgment is necessary, therefore, to discern between true prophets and false.

7:15 **Beware of false prophets.** (Cf. Deut. 13:1-5; Mt. 24:4, 5, 11; Ac. 20:29, 30; Ro. 16:17, 18; II Cor. 11:13-15; Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:4, 8; II Th. 2:3-12; Tit. 1:10, 11; II Pet. 2; I Jn. 4:1; II Jn. 7-11; Rev. 2:2; 19:20; examples: Ac. 13:6-12; I Kg. 13; 22:5-23) A false prophet is any teacher of false doctrine or any teacher who falsely or unjustly claims divine inspiration with a view to authenticate his pronouncements. He pretends to deliver a message from God but really says what is pleasant to his hearers and profitable to himself. (Ro. 16:18; Gal. 6:12, 13; I Tim. 6:3-5; II Tim. 3:1-19; Tit. 1:10-16) There is no practical difference between a false prophet and a false teacher, since the one pretends to reveal God's word, while the other pretends to expound and apply it. Jesus' word adequately applies to both (Gal. 1:6-9). What are the presuppositions behind Jesus' warning against them?

1. Error is possible in religion: there is such a thing as objective truth and falsehood or error. (Mt. 15:1-20; I Tim. 1:12-17; Ac. 18:24-28; 19:1-5; 17:16-34)

2. Error does matter, because false teachers lead men away from the truth which saves. (Cf. Mt. 12:30-33; 10:24-39; 15:13, 14) They constitute a very grave danger to the individual Christian because they can cause him to lose his soul; they are a peril to the corporate body of the Church.

Who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. Why mention "wolves" disguised as sheep? Because it is the nature of such hungry wolves to devour sheep, he is pictured as resorting to this trick in order better to gain the confidence of the flock until it is too late to foil his design through discovery of the ruse. Jesus describes the wolves as *ravening*, i.e. rapacious, hungry to the point of madness. Thus, He gives His judgment upon the real intent and character of the false prophet. The man about whom Jesus is talking is not a simple, self-deceived innocent Christian whose apprehension of the true doctrine has gotten twisted. The disguise is deliberate; the intention was destruction.

7:16 By their fruits ye shall know them. In this brilliant changing of figures, Jesus describes the false prophet as a tree whose fruit betrays his real nature. He could have continued the first metaphor by saying that a wolf betrays his real nature when he starts attacking the sheep and eating them. But that figure would not have been adequate to convey other points of comparison that will be brought out later, so He changed.

By their fruits: not by the leaves of their professions, pretensions or appearances, but by the actual outcome of their lives. (cf. Heb. 13:7) *By their fruits* alone will we *know* them. Not by suspicion or hasty judgment, but by actual fruit, and this takes time to mature. Therefore, it requires patience in the fruit inspector. There is no room in the Lord's vineyard for over-zealous heresy hunters.

But what are the *fruits* which identify the true nature of the man? What are those things the observation of which tell us about the man?

1. The character of the man's personal life. (Gal. 5:19-23; Jas. 3:12-18; Mt. 12:33-36) Does his morality promote lascivious living, self-indulgence or the condoning of sin? Is his mind carnal, i.e. wedded to this earth, this life? (Cf. Mt. 23:1-3) What is the influence of his habits, company, conversation and attitudes? One might be teaching true dogma, while the fruit of his life be entirely

rotten underneath an exterior of respectable orthodoxy. This is a practical test which is most easily and readily applied by any one who has a proper sense of judgment. A man's character is more telling than his doctrine many times because of the intricacies of his theological position that are not so easily traced. One's religion, however held or taught, must stand or fall according to the ethical result it obtains in those who profess to embrace it. So, if his religion makes him partial, spiteful, hateful, immoral, it is false regardless of all protestations to the contrary. Marshall (65f) notes:

It is sometimes objected that such an idea (i.e. that right acts are no sure proof of good character) is flatly contradicted by Jesus' words here . . . 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 thought, conduct as the natural and inevitable expression of 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 . . . so a good character is essential to genuinely good conduct . . . If a man is not morally good, it is only by the merest accident that he ever does what he ought.

2. The doctrine of the man's message. A man may be morally sound through and through, and yet the fruit of his doctrine, when logically worked out in the lives of others, produce vicious consequences. What are the results of his preaching? (Cf. Ro. 16:17, 18; I Tim. 1:3-7, 19b, 20; 4:1-7; 6:3-5) What is the character and conduct of those who follow his teaching? Therefore, test both the doctrine and the teacher by the fruit which each produces, as well as by their apparent consistency with Scripture. But, in practice, one's character affects his teaching and his doctrine affects his character. So, if a man is morally right but teaches doctrine that is false because of his ignorance of the Word, he may be corrected, for he has a conscience and desires to do the Lord's will. But a man whose character is rotten does not need new information, but repentance. If he will not, he is all the more dangerous. The case that Jesus assumes in this section, of course, is that of the ravening *wolf* who would hide his real character with intent to deceive and destroy.

Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Jesus' Greek sentence begins with a negative particle (*mèti*) which expects the question to be answered: "No!" In demonstration of His proposition, Jesus asks two humorous rhetorical questions which put the truth in a more striking form and arouse more attention than if stated simply in an affirmative form: "Just imagine people going out to a briar patch to pick grapes, or taking their basket to a clump of thistles expecting to find figs!" By this illustration, Jesus is saying what every observer of nature knows: every plant produces according to its kind. Grafting and plant improvement do not enter here, because Jesus is talking about plants in general without reference to the various ways the nature of their fruit can be changed. By mentioning these four plants, *grapes*, *figs*, *thorns* and *thistles*, He says that any plant is known and valued on the basis of what it produces.

7:17 **Even so** introduces the point of the rhetorical questions: **every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.** Two trees of the same species may be identical in every respect but the maturing of the fruit reveals their true nature. This general rule is completely applicable to all men, even though the immediate application in Jesus' mind is to the false teachers. It is to be noted that false teachers are to be judged, as Lenski (303) observes: "not according to some exceptional rule pertaining to them only, but according to the universal rule which applies to all."

7:18 **A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.** Just as it is impossible for a natural tree to produce fruit that is contrary to its nature and condition, so it is really impossible for a false prophet to masquerade for very long. His true character, evidenced by his conduct, will eventually betray him.

At this point, Luke (6:43-45) inserts his parallel, however without any direct reference to false prophets, thus proving the universality of the test that Jesus gives. Luke, however, points out that, although conduct is a sure test, however, it is often a much slower one. When a man opens his mouth, whether he intends it or not, he gives himself away. Whatever is hidden in the heart, good or evil, will come out in one's speech. A man's words, especially when he is unconscious of them, are a fairly secure indication of the nature and condition of his heart. (Cf. Mt. 12:33-36)

However, as McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 72) cautions, even some good trees have occasional bad fruit, making it necessary to remember that Jesus is talking about the obvious general tendency of one's life and not of occasional good or bad deeds. (Tit. 1:15; I Jn. 3:4-10)

7:19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (Cf. Mt. 3:10; Lk. 13:6-9; Jn. 15:2, 6; Tit. 3:14) Failure to serve positively in Jesus' name is sufficient grounds for His condemning us. (Cf. Mt. 25:41-46; Note on 7:12) This warning is apparently more general than the single application to false prophets, but as a reference to them it serves notice to others not to follow them lest they too share the same fate. The blind who follow blind leaders, when they fall into the pit, land just as hard as their blind guides! (Mt. 15:14)

7:20 Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Cf. 7:16) Even if this seems to sum up all that Jesus has to say in this section about false prophets, and even if He repeats for emphasis and clarity the primary test by which they are unmasked, yet this transition verse passes Jesus' argument from false prophets to those who ultimately prove themselves to be false disciples ("you who work iniquity").

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is a false prophet? Is he the same as a false teacher? If not, what is the basic difference? If there is a difference, would it change the teaching Jesus gave here?
2. What is intended by the figure of the animals? Who are the sheep whom the disguise is supposed to fool? What is suggested about the real nature and intentions of the false prophets?
3. What is the test that will "de-wool" the wolves?
4. What are the "fruits" by which false prophets betray themselves as such?
5. What is the natural principle behind the mention of "grapes of thorns" and "figs of thistles"?
6. What is the "tree" that Jesus is talking about? (vv. 17-19) Are these various mentions made of the same tree or of various trees?

7. By saying that "a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit," does Jesus mean to imply that a Christian cannot sin? Prove your answer.
8. Who else used the figure about chopping down and burning fruitless trees? When did they use it? To whom were they speaking?
9. What additional figure does Luke record that clarifies Jesus' meaning regarding the judgment of a tree by its fruit?
10. How does the principle explained in this section prepare the mind for the rest of the sermon?

F. THE DANGERS FACING THE WISE AND GODLY MAN (Mt. 7:1-27; Lk. 6:37-49)

7. THE DANGER OF SELF-DECEPTION. (Parallel: Lk. 6:46)

TEXT: 7:21-23

21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.
22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?
23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Would God empower an unconverted "worker of iniquity" to prophesy, cast out demons and do many mighty works? What makes you think so?
- b. Does the phrase, "I never knew you," indicate that the condemned miracle-workers, exorcists and prophets never had been Christians? Prove your answer.
- c. In what sense, then, did Jesus "never know them"?
- d. Do you think these who make this protest to Jesus about their past ministry in His Name, were sincere in their protest? In other words, do you think they are genuinely surprised that the verdict has gone against them? Or do you suppose them to be

rising to the height of hypocrisy, hoping even to deceive the Judge into believing in their fakery by accepting their word about miracles which they did not, in fact, perform by His power. Do you think they did miracles rather by trickery with intent to deceive others through mention of the Lord's respectable Name?

- e. If you think the condemned were actually inspired and empowered by the Lord to do these wonders, what, then, is the basis of Jesus' verdict that they were, in the end, "workers of iniquity"?
- f. What is the relationship between the miracles (prophecies, casting out of demons, etc.) wrought by someone, and his personal morality and consequent salvation? Or is there any such connection?
- g. What is the relation between this section and that which precedes it?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"It is not every one who keeps addressing me as 'Lord, Master,' that will get into God's kingdom, but only those who actually do the will of my heavenly Father. What is the use of calling me 'Lord and Master,' if you do not do what I tell you? On the Day of Judgment, many will protest to me: 'But, Lord, did we not proclaim divine revelations in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name? Did we not many miracles in your name? Indeed we did, Lord!' Then I will tell them to their face, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who work iniquity!'"

SUMMARY

The final test of character and the first requirement for entrance into God's kingdom is willing obedience. That religion is nothing but a sham which will not make a man obey God, regardless of all its other pretences to orthodoxy. Even great evidences of God's personal intervention through the life of a Christian are not necessary evidence of that man's personal conversion and consequent salvation, for he may be finally rejected because of his personal refusal to respond to his own preaching.

NOTES

This section has a natural connection with that which precedes it: if the false prophets will be recognized by the fruit of their lives, what does the fruit of my life indicate about me? Jesus' argument is driving ever closer to the conscience of His disciple:

"My friend, the false teachers will be damned, it is true, on the basis of their deeds, but what about you? What of your deeds?" There are many border-line disciples who would never be called "false prophets" and would never willfully seek to do what a savage wolf in sheep's clothing intends to do. Probably they are decent, law-abiding citizens of their community, good church-goers but have not done the one thing essential to entrance into God's kingdom.

7:21 **Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.** *Not every one:* but some will enter the kingdom. To say to Jesus, *Lord, Lord*, is equivalent to calling Him the Master of one's life. It is claiming that relation to Jesus expressed in the title. (See Mal. 1:6) Luke (6:45) abbreviates this dictum in the form of a hard-hitting rhetorical question: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say?" But as Matthew records the saying, He is not denying that the claimants are His servants or that they adhere to the orthodox teaching He gave them or that they are sincere. Their one grave fault was that they did not DO the Father's will. (Cf. Mt. 21:28-32; 25:11, 12; Ro. 2:12, 13; Jas. 1:22-25; 2:14; I Jn. 2:17) **Only he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven shall enter into the kingdom.** (Study Jn. 5:29; 8:51; 12:26, 44-50; 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:14; II Tim. 3:5) There are those who would be quick to subscribe to the Lordship of Jesus in order to receive the benefits of such a relationship, but they do not often actually try to adopt Jesus' way of thinking, which is, after all, the essence of the will of God (or the kingdom of God, see on 6:9). They might even "crucify" those who tried to live like Jesus. But, for Jesus, performance and production, not profession and pious prayers, is the test of membership in His kingdom. Too often a clear intellectual grasp of truth is divorced from its practical expression. Paul personally feared this possibility (I Cor. 9:27).

There is important psychological insight in Chambers' observation (88,100) that

There is a great snare in the capacity to understand a thing clearly and to exhaust its power by stating it . . . To say things well is apt to exhaust the power to do them, so that a man often has to curb the expression of a thing with his tongue and turn it into action, otherwise his gift of facile utterance may prevent his doing the thing he says. . . . The

frank man is the unreliable man, much more so than the subtle, crafty man, because he has the power of expressing a thing right out and there is nothing more to it.

To have given expression to some truth, such as Jesus' Lordship, without acting upon its clear implications is self-deception, even to those who are involved in His service in some special way. (7:22, 23) Here is another clear principle on how to judge righteous judgments: in judging yourself and your works, do not judge only on the basis of external evidences and appearances and forget the reality of your inward relation to God through real obedience!

The will of my Father is a most significant phrase in this critical moment, because He hereby pronounces Himself Son of the Father in a unique sense, in a relationship shared by none. Shortly (7:24-27) He will praise obedience to His message as the epitome of wisdom and He will denounce failure to build one's life on His word as the height of folly. In a very thinly veiled manner, Jesus is claiming that His words are the very words of God, the obedience to which determines entrance into God's kingdom. Here He proclaims Himself Judge and Lord before whom all must appear in judgment. Neither Moses nor the prophets could speak this way. These great judgments put the rest of the Sermon which precedes them into a different category, completely separate from all brilliant ethical systems constructed by carefully reasoning. For these words alone are the utterances of our Judge. It is with HIS words, and His alone, that we will have to deal! (Cf. Jn. 6:45; 8:24, 31, 32, 47, 51; 12:47, 48)

7:22 Many will say to me in that day. Jesus begins to emphasize the theme with which He will terminate the Sermon: "I am Judge, my Word is the final standard." But He does this not merely to assert His deity, but to give present moral guidance to His disciples in the face of moral failure of former disciples. "Look at Jesus!" (Heb. 12:1-4; II Tim. 2:8f) We tend to panic as some saint we thought secure goes down in sin. We must not repose our confidence in the best man or woman we have ever met! We must trust only the Lord Jesus. *In that day*: see Mt. 10:15; II Th. 1:7-10; II Tim. 1:12; 4:6-8.

Many will say . . . Lord, did we not? Their question implies that they expected an affirmative answer. There is nothing in the context to indicate that these who so address themselves to

Jesus are sheer hypocrites or necessarily false prophets, although they could well be this also. (Cf. Mt. 25:11ff; Lk. 13:25ff for examples of such judgment-scene conversations.) **Did we not:**

1. **Prophecy by thy name?** i.e. utter divine revelation and explain its implications. (Cf. Num. 24:2, 4; I Kg. 22:5-28, esp. v. 11; Jer. 23:17; cf. v. 16)
2. **By thy name cast out demons?** (cf. Mk. 3:14, 19; 6:7, 13; Lk. 10:17-20)
3. **By thy name do many mighty works?** (Cf. Mk. 13:22; I Cor. 13:2)

Some of the above-cited references generally prove that even unconverted men have been granted the power to prophesy, exorcize demons and work miracles. Even the Mosaic Law admitted the possibility that true miracle-working power be evidenced even in false prophets (Dt. 13:1-5). Jesus does not call these claims false and does not deny that the claimants actually did what they said. Whether these claimants be those who sincerely thought they had a right to claim Him as their Lord and reap the benefit of the relationship involved in this title, or whether these are hypocritical false prophets who actually worked miracles in Jesus' name, does not matter greatly in reference to the principle involved, for the result and the verdict is the same. The principle involved is that even the obvious witness of the Holy Spirit, given through such mighty gifts as prophecy, demon-exorcism and mighty signs, is no evidence of personal conversion! (Cf. I Cor. 12:14) But, some would ask, would God give such powers to those whom He could foresee would show up so badly at the final judgment? ("Ye workers of iniquity") But this is just the point: until the final judgment there is yet mercy which leaves the opportunity available to every Christian to do the will of God or to apostasize. Judas Iscariot is a key example. (Study Mt. 10:1-4, 7, 8; Mk. 3:14, 19; 6:7, 13) Jesus knew from the beginning what Judas' end would be, but He empowered him to work right along with the others. God is able to make an instrument of His service even those who may not necessarily remain His willing servants. It is too easy to use Jesus' message and miracles to correct the lives of others without responding personally to the implications of the message ourselves. He is pointing to the possibility of moral failure for the true prophet, the failure to live up to the stringent ethical

requirements of his own divinely-attested message. *Lord, Lord* is not the anguished cry of false prophets, but of miracle-workers who were once true disciples but did not remain faithful to the God who had empowered them. Their final rejection is stated, not on the ground that their claims are false, but that their failure to do the will of God (7:21) was equivalent to working wickedness (5:23; cf. Jas. 4:17).

7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Cf. Mt. 25:12, 41; 13:41; Lk. 6:26; 13:27; I Jn. 3:4) This verse does not disclaim authorization of their miracles and ministry, nor does it deny the reality of their having performed such a ministry, nor does it affirm that it had been pretense all along as merely a ruse to deceive the unwary. Nor is there any indication that they had used their miracles to attest false propaganda. Jesus' verdict involves:

1. His plain declaration: "*I never knew you.*" (Cf. I Cor. 8:3; II Tim. 2:19) They knew Him and were depending upon this knowledge of Him to save them (cf. Lk. 19:22, 23; 13:25, 26). They had thought of Him as *Lord, Lord* and were counting upon this relationship to save them. But they had not done what their knowledge and professed allegiance should have caused them to do. Thus, their claim of intimate acquaintance of Jesus went against them, because, for all that, they should have done better and, hence, were all the more responsible for their failure. *I never knew you* is not a confession of ignorance of their life and ministry, for the Lord knew all about them. He *never knew* them in the sense that He recognizes as genuine no disciple who does not fix his heart upon doing what God wills. Within the limits of the information offered in this text, it is possible to view these claimants as Christian servants who began to serve Jesus, yes, even worked great signs and wonders, but did not connect their own morality to their true religion and thus failed so miserably to do God's will. Despite all their professions, they had really been evil because their religion was totally expended in prayers, portents and preachments; it had no practice.
2. His rejection of their company for eternity: *Depart from me!* (Cf. Mt. 25:41, 46a)

3. The justification of the verdict: they had really been *workers of iniquity*. If these are false prophets whom He thus addresses, there is no problem, for their doom is clear and needs no explanation. But if these condemned men were once disciples, an explanation is in order. Jesus finishes this section and moves smoothly into the final illustration with which He closes this tremendous Sermon. But there is a clear connection that runs from 7:21 to 7:27 and provides explanation of the phrase at hand: *ye workers of iniquity*. That clear connection is the ethical problem of not living up to the light we possess, because of the simple (but also profound) failure to do what we have heard in God's Word. (Jas. 1:16-25) Therefore, Jesus is regarding anyone—be he a true disciple, true prophet or false—who stops at hearing and knowing His word, short of full-souled obedience, as a *worker of iniquity*, for the result is practically the same as if he had never known the way of righteousness.

The formula is as simple as the warning is severe:

1. Only calling Jesus "Lord" is not doing God's will.
2. Only hearing Jesus' will it not obedience.
3. Only working miracles is not obedience.
4. Only doing God's will is obedience.
5. All else is disobedience and worthy of severest condemnation.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. To whom is reference made in the phrase: "every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord"?
2. What does Jesus mean by the "kingdom of heaven"? (v. 21) What then, is meant by entering it?
3. What is the one requirement Jesus mentions for entrance into the kingdom?
4. What does it mean to address Jesus as Lord, in the negative sense in which some would do so but not enter His kingdom?
5. What does it mean to address Jesus as Lord in the normal, right sense?
6. By the repetition of the double vocative, "Lord, Lord," does Jesus mean to identify those in verse 21 who do not do the will

of the Father, with those in verse 22 who claim to have worked miracles in Jesus' name?

7. What is so important to the success of the miracle-workers' protest that they argue that their works were done "in thy name"? Note that the phrase, "in thy name," is repeated each time.
8. What false ideas is Jesus correcting by His remarks about His rejection of certain prophets, certain exorcists and certain miracle-workers?
9. Name some obviously unconverted men who really worked God-given miracles or prophesied under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.
10. As a matter of fact, did Jesus deny that the condemned "workers of iniquity" had really done miracles, cast out demons or prophesied in His name?

G. THE WISDOM OF THE WISE AND GODLY MAN IN OBEYING JESUS

(Parallel: Luke 6:47-49)

TEXT: 7:24-27

24. Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man, who build his house upon the rock:
25. and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock.
26. And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand:
27. and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you think Jesus put so much emphasis on doing what His words require?
- b. Why do men applaud the Sermon on the Mount and yet fail to obey Jesus by trying to live up to what He teaches?

- c. Why is it that many people accept Christ and begin to build on His word, and then fail to continue a life of faithful building?
- d. Why do you suppose Jesus ended this tremendous Sermon this way?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Let me show you what those who come to me, listen to my words and act upon them are really like. They may be compared to a prudent man who, in building his house, had the good sense to dig down and go deep to lay the foundation on solid rock. The rain fell, the flood waters swept down, the winds blew. They pounded that house, but it did not fall. They could not even shake it, since it was well built and its foundations had been laid on bedrock. But he who listens to these my words but does not act upon them will be like the fool who built his house upon the sand without any foundation. The rain fell and the rivers swelled, the winds blew and hammered that house, and it collapsed immediately. The wreck of the house was complete!"

SUMMARY

Blessed is the man who hears what Jesus has said, believes Him and acts upon it, for he has security for his soul that no crisis, no matter how great, can destroy! Woe is the man who fully knows what the Lord has said but ignores it and Him, for no security on earth, no matter how great, can protect him from all inevitable crises of this life and the terrors of the age to come!

NOTES

7:24 **Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine.** This is no mere summation of what goes before, although there is a direct connection with the argument on judging: you must discern the difference between merely hearing God's Word and putting it into practice. Further, Jesus is declaring the consequence of the acceptance or rejection of His teaching. All that Jesus has taught up to this point has indicated, illustrated and urged the perfection to which He would lead His disciple. But this conclusion challenges his response to the message: what will you **DO** about it? *These words of mine* is not a contrast to any other words of Jesus any more than *of mine* contrasts those of the apostles, for it was God's authority which stood behind anything else that Jesus might teach or that His

apostles might reveal. *These words of mine* is merely His emphatic way of separating His own teaching from all human authority and of calling attention to Himself as the revealer of the final Word from God by which any man would be saved or lost. When compared with Jesus' wilderness struggle with Satan in that crisis of character (4:1-11), this passage takes on more brilliance. In effect, He is saying: "Even as I depended upon every word of God upon which to build my character and by which I overcame the tempter, even so you must depend upon my word as you prepare for your great crises of soul!" Who is this who thus places His own message on a par with that God-given word revealed to Moses and the prophets, guaranteeing our moral safety in crisis if we do what He says? **Every one that heareth . . . and doeth** (Cf. Notes on 6:10; 7:21; see also Lk. 8:21; Jn. 6:29, 40; 8:31, 47, 51; 12:26, 47-50; 14:15, 21-24; 15:14; Jas. 1:22-25; I Jn. 2:17; 3:22-24) Obedience is Jesus' final test of our real loyalty and discipleship.

He shall be likened unto a wise man (cf. 25:2) **Who built his house.** In this parable both builders understandably wish to locate their house near a source of water, since water in Palestine is very precious. This builder had the good foresight to construct his house **upon the rock.** Luke (6:48) seems to suggest that both houses were constructed in exposed positions, since "a flood arose, the stream broke against that house." If Matthew and Luke are recording the same story, it would seem that this wise builder dug deep before laying the foundation upon bedrock. Palestine is a country of rugged torrent beds especially from the central watershed east to the Jordan Valley. In the summer, during building season, these are dry, but in the winter rainy season they become ugly, raging torrents of racing water. The question of whether the wise builder were less far-sighted for his choice of a site so exposed to *floods* does not enter here, because in the real life application of Jesus' story, there is no place where we may develop our character, protected from temptation and the crises which threaten to destroy us entirely. The point is not the wisdom or folly of choosing a site more or less exposed to floods, but of preparing for every eventuality by building *upon the rock.* Perhaps Jesus is identifying *the rock* as the Word of God, backed by the character of God and expressed perfectly in Jesus. (Cf. Dt. 32:4, 15, 18, 31; Psa. 18:2; Isa. 28:16; I Cor. 3:11; I Pet. 2:6)

7:25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. The test of a building is not its striking beauty but the strength of its foundation. The picture changes from the hot, dry summer when the house was built, to the winter rains which swell the little creeks into roaring torrents which batter everything in its downward rush to the sea. The storm is anything that throws the soul into a crisis. It is any temptation to do anything other than what Jesus says. The proof of the durability of a life or character is not its outward manifestation only but its real formation according to Jesus' word. If we have built ourselves, our character, our life, little by little by listening to Jesus' words and by obeying Him, we will have fused into our habitual way of thinking the tremendous power of God, so that when the supreme crisis comes we stand as solid as the rock on which we have so securely fastened our life. The crisis may come unexpectedly, but when it does come the whole story of our life is told in a few seconds. Here there is no opportunity to pretend: either we stand or else we are morally destroyed immediately.

These very words begin to separate Jesus' audience into two basic groups: those who would listen, believe and obey Him stand on the one hand. On the other, there are those who either have no intention of obeying Him or else those who have heard but will immediately forget, or those who promise but will not keep it up. (See Notes on 7:13, 14, 21; cf. Mt. 12:30)

7:26 And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not. (Cf. Notes on 6:10; 7:12, 21) Not mere knowledge of the will of God makes a man a real Christian, but the practice of what he knows. (Jas. 4:17; cf. 1:22-27; Heb. 10:26, 27) **Shall be likened unto a foolish man.** (Cf. Mt. 25:2) Regardless of how sensible a man may be in all other affairs of his life, if he builds his whole life with all its eternally supreme value on something else than Jesus' word, that man is a fool! **Who built his house on the sand.** To this, Luke adds (6:49) "on the ground without a foundation." The *sand* is just as definite in meaning as its antithesis, *the rock*. If the *rock* refers to Jesus' teachings, i.e. the Word of God, the *sand* is simply anything else which is used as the basis for one's life. Man could choose from any human philosophy he wishes, but Jesus says that as far as the outcome is concerned, they are all SAND. All is well as long as the

sun shines, but this gives a false sense of security, since before the storm both builders found their houses useful and relatively secure. But it is the crisis that demonstrated the true nature of the constructions. The man, who has not built his character, habits and attitudes upon God's Word, will go down immediately before some great crisis, no matter how strong is his will to stand. It is too easy to admire and quote Jesus' sayings, but do we DO them in our private lives, in our homes, on the job? Do we DO them so consistently that they form the basis of our basic viewpoints?

7:27 **And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew and smote upon that house.** The same crisis arises but arrives at the second house with abated force, for whereas Jesus had described the first house built upon the rock as being beaten with terrific force (*prospiptó*), He now pictures this house as being "stumbled against" (*proskoptó*) by the tempest and flood. By these different words He may be suggesting that it takes much less a crisis to bring down a man whose life is not founded on God's Word revealed by Jesus. **And it fell and great was the fall thereof.** Jesus leaves His audience breathlessly listening to the reverberating crash of the wrecked house sounding in their ears, and watching the swirling torrent gouge away the sand and wash away the wreck of the structure. "This is the tragedy of a disobedient life: decide where you stand in relation to my words!"

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is the right way to receive the revelation that Jesus gives?
2. Explain the various elements of the parable of the two builders.
3. What does Jesus call a man who will not do what He says?
4. Upon what do many people base their lives, other than the word of Jesus?

THE IMPACT OF JESUS' PREACHING

TEXT: 7:28—8:1

28. And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching:
29. For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.
- 8:1. And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How do you explain the fact that it was when Jesus had finished that the multitudes were astonished, when, in fact, there is much in the Sermon that would have caused much surprise, shock, admiration, fear and amazement much before this?
- b. What was there about the teaching of Jesus that caused the crowds to arrive at the particular conclusion about Him that they did?

PARAPHRASE

When Jesus finished this message, the people were amazed at His teaching, for, quite unlike their rabbis, He taught them like one who had authority. Numerous crowds of people followed Him as He descended the mountain.

SUMMARY

The difference between Jesus and any other rabbi, yes, and any other human teacher lay in the question of authority. They cited it, but He possessed it. People could see the difference, so they followed Jesus.

NOTES

7:28 And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words. This phrase proves that this is one entire sermon, delivered as Matthew records it here. There was a definite beginning (5:2) and this is the clear conclusion to the discourse. It is not a compilation either by Matthew or some other, as some scholars assume.

The multitudes were astonished at his teaching. (Cf. Mt. 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 1:27; 11:18; Lk. 4:32; Ac. 13:12) That they should suddenly be astonished at His teaching, when actually most of His sermon was most surprising and quite contradictory to their most cherished beliefs, might seem a forced and unnatural reaction. But the psychological impact of the Sermon, as here described, is altogether proper, for, as long as Jesus was speaking, everyone listened spellbound, even if some of Jesus' sayings were too new and different to be true and readily acceptable. Then, when He finished His resounding conclusion and stopped talking, the audience itself relaxed and the total impact of what He had said began to take hold in their minds. Amazement swept over the crowds as they confirmed their impressions with their neighbors.

7:29 For he taught them as one having authority. This is the major reason for the reaction of the audience. **And not as their scribes.** The scribes habitually cited as authorities the ancients to establish their tenets, while Jesus showed that He possessed supreme, perfect authority Himself in His own person. He did not base the truth of His message even upon the Old Testament, for He has revealed ideals that surpassed even the lofty ethics of the Law and has done this so brilliantly that not even the doctors of the Law could refute Him. Implied in His presentation of the ideals of perfection on the one hand, and of the depths of human wickedness on the other, is His personal incarnation of the ethics that He teaches. There is no hint of an apology for failure to meet His own standard, there is no confession of sin. Further, He has declared Himself the Judge of the world and that His teaching was the standard by which all would be measured. And this measure of difference that separates Jesus from the Jewish scribes also yawns as an uncrossable chasm between Him and all other religio-ethical teachers. Jesus is not important because what He taught was so great, but His message is vitally essential because **HE IS GREAT.**

8:1 And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. What will they do about Jesus' unparalleled Sermon? Some will build wisely; some will be fools. Some will be astonished but not be stirred to obedience. Some will refuse as first, then obey later; some will promise at first, then not come through. Let us humbly follow Him also, doing what He says and enter the kingdom of God.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. Write an outline of the Sermon on the Mount. As far as possible, make it an interpretative outline, showing all the parts of it in their relation to the main theme and to each other.
2. List from the Sermon on the Mount all the statements which assert or clearly imply the deity of Christ.
3. State rather briefly in your own words the essential nature of the righteousness which Jesus is trying to teach in the Sermon. What kind of character does it require? How does one get to be that kind of person?
4. Discuss the nature and purpose of the Sermon on the Mount. On whom was it intended to be binding? What is its relation

to the gospel and to the means of salvation? What was it meant to accomplish?

5. Discuss "the kingdom" as preached by John, and then as preached by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In doing this explain what it was that He called "the kingdom."

DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

Where are the following passages found? Who said it? On what occasion? To whom was it said? Why was it said? What does it mean? Are there parallel passages? variant manuscript readings? important other translations of the verse? Are there problems in interpreting it? How is it to be applied to our lives?

1. "I say unto you, every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment."
2. "Narrow is the gate and straitened the way that leadeth unto life."
3. "Give to him that asketh thee."
4. "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven."
5. "Judge not that ye be not judged."
6. "For every one that asketh receiveth."
7. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."
8. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."
9. "When thou fastest, anoint thy head."
10. "Agree with thine adversary quickly."
11. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."
12. "By their fruits ye shall know them."
13. "If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."
14. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"
15. "How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"
16. "And bring us not into temptation."
17. "They have received their reward."

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