

New European Commentary: The Gospel of Mark

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## MARK CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*- This may simply mean that Mark is beginning at the beginning, with the account of John the Baptist. Given the intensity attached to words used in the Gospels, which are highly abbreviated records anyway, that would appear somewhat superfluous. It's likely he also meant to suggest that the events of the Gospel record were only a beginning, and in the lives of all future disciples, the Gospel story continues. John begins his Gospel with the same word- "In the beginning was the word". Luke uses a related word when he says that his Gospel was the record of all that Jesus "began to do" (Acts 1:1), with the implication that it was not being continued. So we are to see the Gospel records as a beginning of the work and word of Jesus, which continues into our lives. Matthew uses the same word in saying that Jesus "began to preach" (Mt. 4:17). Indeed, this word is later used by Matthew concerning how Jesus 'began' to do and teach things (Mt. 11:7,20; 16:21; 18:24); we are to understand that this beginning implies a continuation, and that continuation is in our lives. Mark's Gospel opens with Jesus going around preaching, appealing for people to repent and believe the Gospel (and this is described as "the beginning of the Gospel"). Mark concludes with *us* being asked to do the same, thereby directly continuing the work of the Lord, because we are in Him. The only other occurrence of the phrase "beginning of the Gospel" is in Phil. 4:15, where it means the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel. Mark's gospel is a transcript of how he or Peter used to teach the Gospel; it was written down under inspiration so that it would be preserved for future generations. We learn from this that the Gospel is in the gospels. The good news is essentially the biography and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The rest is interpretation.

The Greek text in Mark often has a rhythm and rhyme to it created by similar sounding words- because the early church aimed for new converts to memorize Mark's Gospel. Just one example from Mk. 1:1:

*Ar-khay tou you-ang-ge -lee-ou Yay-sou Khrees-tou whee-ou the -ou.*

The 'ou' endings are somehow rhythmical. Especially do we see this rhythmical quality in the phrase used for "Jesus Christ the Son of God" in Mk. 1:1: "*Ieso-u Christo-u huio-u Theo-u*".

1:2 *Just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Look, I send My messenger before your face-* Both the MT and LXX in Mal. 3:1 have "before Me". The face of the Lord Jesus was the face of God. He was the man with the face of God. To meet Him, to spit upon that face, was to do so to the face of God. And in Judaism it was well known that not even Moses could see the face of God. But it was now revealed in the face of the Lord Jesus. 'Face' in Semitic thought refers also to the presence; the presence of Jesus can be felt today, and it is none less than coming before the face of God. "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you" is how Mk. 1:2 quotes Mal. 3:1; but "before your face" is added, as if to create a reference to the Angel sent before Israel in the wilderness, to find a resting place (Ex. 23:20). The parallel is set up between John and the Angel, and therefore between Jesus and the people of Israel. The Lord Jesus *is* His people. He personally is the vine, the one body- symbols of the whole community. He isn't the trunk, and we the branches. We are the branches, and He is the whole vine. We are Him to this world. Thus Eph. 3:20,21 and many other passages parallel Christ and the ecclesia. "The servant" of Isaiah's prophecies is therefore both Israel and the Lord Jesus. The fact He was and is the representative of God's people means that those in Him must act and witness as Him.

*He will prepare your way-* This was John's intended mission, and he certainly tried to achieve it. But ultimately his mission failed in that Israel were generally like the children sitting in the marketplace with John as it were weeping to them- and they didn't respond. There was the possibility that if John's mission had succeeded, then Messiah could have come to Zion in glory over the made up way or road. But they didn't respond as needed- despite being baptized and approving his message in crowds. This is a sobering thought- that such response alone is not the same as really responding to the call for radical preparation for the coming of the Christ.

In response to Israel's attitude of "Where is the God of judgment?", and a genuine failure to realize their sinfulness ("wherein have we...?"), God prophesied He would send His messenger and then His Christ; His Son was by His coming alone the manifestation of "the God of judgment", the supreme judge of men by His very being (Mal. 2:17; 3:1). In His coming, God "visited His people" (Lk. 7:16); but the OT image of Yahweh visiting His people was one of visiting in judgment (Ez. 32:34; Jer. 23:2; Hos. 2:13; 9:9). By His very being amongst men He would convict them of their sinfulness. His light would show up the shadows of their sins. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this Malachi passage, as if to say that the appearance of Jesus was the coming of judgment for men (Mk. 1:2). This judgment-coming of Jesus at His revelation to Israel 2000 years ago is then described as God coming near to men in judgment (Mal. 3:5). This is why a consideration of the Lord Jesus in bread and wine inevitably and

naturally leads to self-examination; for He is, by His very being, our immediate and insistent judge.

1:3- see on Mt. 11:14.

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness-* The idea is of a radio play for voices. We are focused not upon the person of John, but upon his message, upon the voice crying in the wilderness. We likewise are to hear the message of the preacher rather than being side-tracked by his or her personality. For we preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ. But John didn't literally go into the desert and shout out his message with nobody listening but the wild camels and conies. The image is that actually it was a spiritual wilderness- it was *as if* there was nobody there listening, even though there were large crowds listening to his message with apparent approval. The hint is that actually he may as well have been shouting out in the desert with nobody listening. The same metaphor of a wilderness is used in speaking of how at this very time, the Lord Jesus arose as a tender green shoot out of a parched land (Is. 53:1). We might be able to infer from this that it was John who prepared the way for the personal emergence and spirituality of the Lord Jesus out of an environment which was otherwise unresponsive to his message. Or perhaps we are to make the connection with the fact that after John's preaching, the Lord Jesus went into that same barren wilderness, was tempted and emerged spiritually triumphant, for the same words are found in 1:12- Jesus went "immediately" (s.w. "straight" regarding his way) into the wilderness. It could be that His triumphant emergence from the wilderness was partly due to the inspiration he received there from John's preaching.

*Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight-* The work of John was to prepare the way for Jesus (1:2), but this would be achieved insofar as individuals prepared themselves. But Israel generally were not prepared by John, they rejected the One whose road John tried to prepare. But the Greek word translated "prepare" is commonly used in the New Testament for how the Father and Son are 'preparing' our place in the Kingdom, of how the Lord Jesus was the Passover lamb 'prepared', and how on the cross, He prepared a place for us in His Father's Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). But this was all plan B. The potential and intended plan was that Israel would respond to John's message and repent, thus becoming a people prepared for the Lord Jesus (Lk. 1:17,76 are very clear about this). Failure to respond has never stopped the God of all grace; He takes over where human response fails. Such is His passion for our final salvation. This thought should calm the fearful hearts of all we who at times shake our heads at our own paucity of response and preparation.

That one purpose of our calling to the Gospel is to assist others is brought out by the way John the Baptist prepared a highway in the desert through baptizing repentant people (Mk. 1:3,4). This highway was to be a path *to*

Christ as well as the one He would travel. And it's worth reflecting that Christ can only come once the way for Him is prepared- as if His coming depends upon a certain level of response to our preaching, especially to the Jews of the very last days.

1:4 *John came and baptized in the wilderness, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*- The two clauses in this sentence appear to be the wrong way around. We would expect to read that John came preaching baptism, and then baptized people. One way around the problem is to imagine that the second clause ("preaching the baptism...") is as it were in brackets, explaining that the baptism he performed was not Christian baptism but simply a sign of repentance and request for remission of sins. But Mt. 3:11 makes it explicit that his baptism *preceded* the call for repentance. "Baptize... unto repentance" alludes to the Isaiah 40 passage which offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

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

John the Baptist's audience responded to his preaching by being baptized "with the baptism of repentance" (Mk. 1:4); and yet the Lord Jesus built

on this by appealing to people to repent because the Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. Earlier, Israel had appeared to have fruit, when actually, they didn't have any at all (Hos. 10:1). The man in the parable built his spiritual house, but in fact he didn't get down to the real nitty-gritty of obedience to the Lord's words; and so it miserably, pathetically fell at judgment day. The seriousness of sin becomes de-emphasized in our lives, until repentance comes to mean a vague twinge of guilt. This, again, was the problem of Old Testament Israel. "They return, but not to the Most High" (Hos. 7:16); they had the sensation of regret, of turning back- but it wasn't real repentance. A few verses earlier God had commented: "They do *not* return to the Lord their God" (7:10); but they on a surface level *did* return to Him. Hosea continues his theme: "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself" (Hos. 10:1). Did they or did they not bring forth fruit? They did- but only in their own eyes. They felt they had repented, and brought forth spiritual fruit. But not in God's estimation. And we too can have the sensation of spirituality and even spiritual growth, but only in our own eyes. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

Remember that this is in explanation of what the content of the Gospel was (1:1). The good news is not solely of a future political Kingdom to be established on earth at Christ's return. It is of forgiveness of sins right now.

1:5 *And there went out to him all the country of Judea and all they of Jerusalem-* The emphasis on "all" is perhaps to make the point that there was mass response to John's message about Jesus; and yet ultimately, his mission failed, because these large masses of people did not fully accept Christ despite their acceptance of John's teaching and baptism. "They of Jerusalem" are depicted as those who later refused or were at best agnostic towards the Lord Himself (e.g. "they of Jerusalem", Jn. 7:25 s.w.). We get the impression that the Galileans were more receptive of the Lord than "they of Jerusalem". They were eager enough to get caught up in a movement teaching that Messiah would soon come; but when He actually came, they didn't want Him. It can be that some are so enthused about "the signs of the times" that personal relationship with the Lord

Jesus becomes subsumed beneath the interest in the search and expectation, rather than the finding. And that is observable in so many people today.

*And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins-* Judaism at the time believed that the Elijah prophet must appear and baptize a repentant Israel, and then Messiah would come and save them from Roman domination. Their confession of sin was therefore unlikely to have been totally genuine; as noted above, these mass crowds later rejected the Lord Jesus as Messiah. Repentance can therefore be insincere, or surface level, tokenistic rather than from the heart. And yet despite being aware of this, John made no attempt to judge or assess the sincerity of repentance before baptism; and neither can we.

*1:6 And John was clothed with camel's hair and had a leather girdle about his waist, and-* John 'put on' [Gk.] this outfit, in conscious imitation of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). He took his calling seriously and intentionally emulated the Bible character most relevant to his work, just as we should. John is presented as a cameo of all the faithful (Heb. 11:37 = Mk. 1:6 and 1 Cor. 15:47 = Jn. 3:31).

*Ate locusts and wild honey-* To 'eat' in Semitic terms can mean to dominate or absorb into oneself. Locusts are consistently used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel's enemies (Dt. 28:38; Jud. 6:5; 7:12; Jer. 46:23; 51:14; Joel 1:4). John's father Zacharias had incorrectly supposed that the herald of Messiah would be directly involved in bringing about the triumphant coming of that Messiah in order to destroy Israel's enemies (Lk. 1:71,74). It seems that John lived out parental expectation and thus made the same mistake, assuming that he as the herald of Messiah was effectively Messiah, and that Israel's locust enemies were therefore soon going to be subdued. It was Messiah who was to eat honey (Is. 7:15,22), and again John seems to see himself as effectively the Messiah figure, so close was his identity with Him. He knew that he was heralding Messiah, but he presented himself as Messiah, knowing that Messiah's representatives were effectively Him to the world. We are in the same position. What John failed to realize, just as his father had failed to, was that Messiah had the possibility of being rejected, and the promised salvation and Kingdom of God could well be long after His initial exposure to Israel.

*1:7 He preached, saying: There comes after me-* Gk. 'behind me', alluding to John as a herald, the one who went before the greater one. His message included up front that he was not preaching himself, but One far mightier and better than himself.

*He that is mightier than I-* The Greek is that translated 'stronger' and the idea of Jesus as the one 'stronger / mightier than' recurs in Lk. 11:22,

where Jesus is 'mightier than' the 'strong man' who had previously possessed the house of Israel. That there is a connection of thought here cannot be denied, but the existence of such a connection doesn't of itself mean that there is a detailed semantic connection. Perhaps John's words had simply left a subconscious impression upon the word choice of the Lord.

*Whose shoelaces I am not worthy to-* The idea of untying sandals was an idiom for being a herald of a person. John was doing this, untying the sandals, for he was the herald; but he is saying that he is unworthy to do the job he was doing. This must be a feature of our proclamation- a clear statement of our own inadequacy.

*Stoop down-* Gk. 'to bend toward'. John saw himself as bowing at the feet of Jesus in his work of witnessing about Him; and this should be our attitude. All self-presentation and self-exaltation through preaching is the very opposite of what the work of witness is all about. It is a bowing at our Lord's feet in unworthiness.

*And untie-* The same word used about Moses unloosing his sandals at the beginning of his public ministry, at the burning bush (Acts 7:33). John surely felt that the Lord Jesus was the second Moses, but so exalted, so higher than Moses, that the Lord should not unloose His own shoes, but rather John as His servant would unloose them for Him. To see anyone, Messiah included, as greater than Moses was a paradigm breaker within Jewish thought.

*1:8 I baptized you in water, but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit-* The Greek grammar could just as well mean 'I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with that *as well as* with the Holy Spirit'. The structure 'I [this], but He [that]' is used in a number of languages in this way- meaning effectively 'He [this + that]'. Indeed the Greek *de* translated "but" is also translated "also". For water baptism was clearly practiced by those following Jesus in the early church; they understood His baptism to involve water baptism. John's version of this material is in the record of the discussion with Nicodemus, where He says we must be "born of water and of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3-5- this is one of many examples of where John repeats the essence of the material chosen by the other Gospel writers). If John the Baptist's words here apply generally and not just to the disciples, then we note that every baptism is therefore effectively the Lord Jesus baptizing the person. The human baptizer who holds our shoulders as we are immersed is therefore irrelevant- we are baptized by none less than the Lord Jesus. Just as literally as John baptized people, so Jesus baptizes us to this day. The reference to water and spirit is repeated, with the same Greek words being used, when just two verses later we read of the Lord Jesus arising from the baptismal water and the Spirit descending (1:10). This cannot be incidental. The idea is clearly that the baptism of water and Spirit is the baptism Jesus Himself experienced, and His

baptismal experience becomes ours in Christian baptism- for the act identifies us with Him, with His death and resurrection. It cannot be denied, however, that the reference to a future baptism in Spirit has reference to the specific experience of the disciples; Acts 1:5 records the Lord Jesus stating clearly to them that John had truly baptized them with water, but soon they were to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. And this was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Spirit as tongues of fire fell upon them. Matthew and Luke add that the Lord's baptism was to be of Spirit and fire (Mt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16)- which was clearly fulfilled at Pentecost. But the impression is given that the general principle remains for all time- Christian baptism is a participation in the baptism of Jesus, which involved water and Spirit. Peter reasoned that if people had received the Spirit then they must also be baptized in water (Acts 10:47), suggesting he understood the promise of water-and-spirit baptism as relevant to believers of all ages. Indeed, in explaining his actions here Peter says that he was inspired by the Lord's own teaching that John baptized with water, but His followers were to be baptized by the Spirit (Acts 11:16). This means that Peter's insistence that there must be water baptism too shows that he didn't believe that water baptism had been superseded by a Spirit-only baptism. Rather did he understand John's words and those of the Lord as suggested above- that John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize not only with water but also with the Spirit.

It must be remembered throughout this discussion that the Greek and Hebrew words for 'spirit' and 'wind' are the same. The teaching about baptism in wind / spirit and fire has to be understood in the context of the metaphor of winnowing which follows immediately in Mt. 3:12 and Lk. 3:17, whereby the Lord Jesus is pictured as threshing His people by casting them into the wind, and thus separating out the chaff, which He then burns in fire. The above evidence must be given its due weight- that baptism in Spirit refers to later Christian experience in baptism. But it cannot be denied that there is connection to the metaphor of winnowing in wind and condemnation in fire, speaking of the condemnation of the wicked at the last day. Christian baptism is a symbolic death, an acceptance of condemnation for sin- and yet at the same time a connection with resurrection and hope of life eternal. Or it could be that the baptism in Spirit and fire speaks of two separate things- the acceptance of the faithful and destruction of the wicked in fire. But this is hard to square with the Lord's usage of the prediction of fire baptism with His baptism of the disciples with fire and Spirit at Pentecost.

*1:9 And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee-* The idea is that the Lord Jesus came forth from the obscure, despised north of Israel and began His public ministry at His baptism. John's Gospel puts this in more abstract, spiritual terms in saying that Jesus came down or came forth from God. This language, therefore, does



not speak of any literal descent from Heaven to earth of a pre-existent being.

*And was baptized by John in the river Jordan-* The Greek *hupo* ("by") speaks of being beneath another. He was baptized under John's ministry and authority. Here we see the Lord's humility in submission, and we can better understand John's reticence at baptizing Him. We would rather expect to read of the Lord's baptism *by* John, but *hupo* doesn't mean simply 'by'. The validity of baptism doesn't of itself depend upon the baptizer, but we do also have a sense in the New Testament that the baptizer often had some sense of responsibility for their converts.

1:10 *And immediately coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open and the Spirit* - The contrast is with how as the Lord came *up*, so the Spirit came *down* upon Him. There was a meeting of Heaven and earth, of God and man, in the man Christ Jesus. This ascending and descending was associated with "the heavens opened". These three concepts are to be found in Jn. 1:51: "Hereafter you will see Heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". The context of Jn. 1:51 is that John has just spoken of how *he* had seen the Spirit descending upon Jesus and remaining upon Him [at His baptism], proving that He was indeed the Messianic figure who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:32,33). The Lord Jesus is surely alluding to this, teaching that "hereafter" the disciples would *also* see what John had just said he had seen. And they would not just see it once, but would perceive that Heaven was now permanently open, and the ascent and descent of God's Spirit in the Angels ["He makes His Angels spirits", Heb. 1:7) was not just a one-time incident at the Lord's baptism, but was ongoing in His life. The comment that they would "see" this must be understood in the context of how John's Gospel uses the idea of 'seeing'. It refers to spiritual perception rather than literally seeing a specific incident. The only other time Mark uses the Greek word translated "opened" is in describing how the veil of the temple was "rent" at the Lord's death (Mk. 15:38), thus making the way into the most Holy ['Heaven', in the tabernacle symbology] open to all (Heb. 9:8). The opening of the Heavens at the Lord's baptism therefore looked forward to what would happen at His death; for He understood His baptism as also having an ongoing dimension, culminating in His death (Lk. 12:50). At His death, the Spirit would freely ascend and descend on Him, through the ministry of the Angels (Jn. 1:51), and the book of Acts records how this happened in the history of the body of Christ, the church. And in this we see the sense of the obvious connection to the experience at Bethel, the house of God, which represents the church- the Angels ascended and descended upon that place.

*As a dove descending upon him-* The Greek can equally refer to a pigeon. The hovering of the Spirit over the waters of creation can be read as an allusion to the hovering of a dove; in which case, seeing water is also present at the Lord's baptism, we can see the theme of a new creation being developed. What arose from the waters with a dove's presence was not a new planet, but the man Christ Jesus- the apex and quintessence of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). I consider it unlikely that John saw a literal dove fly down. Therefore the comparison with a dove is intentional; and surely to recall some earlier Biblical allusion. Noah's dove likewise was associated with water, and the flood water is also understood by Peter as representative of baptism; and again there is the theme of a new creation and God's loving goodwill toward men being developed. It's tempting to accept a variant manuscript reading of the Messianic prophecy of Is. 11:1,2: "A shoot will come out of the stump of Jesse... like a dove the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him" (see George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2005 p. 20)). In any case, the idea of the descent of the Spirit was predicted as being a sign of Messiah, and John therefore felt confirmed in saying that he had seen with his own eyes the confirmation that Jesus was Messiah (Jn. 1:32).

1:11 *And a voice came out of the heavens: You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased-* See on 2 Pet. 1:17. The voice had the same intonation as the voice on the mount of transfiguration; it was the voice of God Himself in person. The Father's 'pleasure' spoke also of His 'will'. His will was done, and His pleasure thereby achieved, "in" His Son; because of the Lord's internal state of mind. And this sets the path toward understanding our own status "in Christ".

1:12 *And the Spirit immediately drove him into-* The Greek *ekballo* means to cast out, to drive out from one place to another. But Matthew and Luke both say He was "led" by the Spirit into the wilderness. There were therefore both push and pull factors. He was led by the Spirit, perhaps in the form of an Angel. The allusion is to Israel at their baptism at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2); immediately afterwards, they too entered the wilderness, for 40 years instead of 40 days. We note that the Lord's quotations against temptation were all from the Deuteronomy passages concerning Israel's experiences in the desert. They were *led out* of Egypt, and yet they were also *cast out* of Egypt. The Lord's 'driving out' could therefore refer to opposition which forced the Lord to leave that area, as if there were some who strongly reacted against the declaration that He was God's Son; we read the same of how He was cast or driven out from Nazareth. Yet Israel's experience was typical of that of all God's people. And that experience is being made the prototype for what happened to

the Lord at His baptism. Whilst the Lord's baptism differed in some dimensions from ours, clearly we are to see our baptisms as a participation in His; or rather, the other way around. His baptism enabled Him to enter into ours. See on 1:13 *took care*.

Note how Legion was 'driven' by 'the demon' into a wilderness (Lk. 8:29)- as if to imply that the Lord's wilderness experience enabled Him to identify with the episodes of mental illness experienced by the man. So many of His experiences were likewise to enable Him to enter into the essential experiences of us His people.

*The wilderness*- There is an intended connection with the fact that John had been living in and preaching in "the wilderness" (1:3,4). Clearly the same "wilderness" is in view. The very place where John had preached about Jesus' Messiahship and Kingdom was where He was now being tested. It follows that His temptations were therefore related to the things which John had preached about Him there, and the fact that in that very same place, the crowds had apparently agreed to follow this new Messiah. All the temptations were concerning these things and the Lord's temptations were to misuse them. This is more ground for considering the temptations to have been internal to the thought processes of Jesus, as argued in our comments on the wilderness temptations on Matthew 4. But perhaps we can also speculate that we are intended to think of "the wilderness" as the location of persons who believed in Jesus as Messiah and wished to see His Messianic Kingdom. So there's no reason why the satan / adversary could not have been a Jewish person or persons suggesting to Jesus these ideas of immediate Messianic rule. The temptations departed from the Lord for a period, implying they returned (Lk. 4:13). And elsewhere we read of Him going out into deserted places [s.w. "wilderness"] and praying (1:35,45; Lk. 5:16) or struggling with crowds who wanted an immediate Messianic Kingdom (Mt. 14:13,15; Mk. 6:31; Jn. 11:54)- perhaps suggesting that the same temptations returned later in His ministry.

1:13- see on 1 Cor. 15:45.

*And he was in the wilderness forty days*- See on 1:12 *Drives Him*.

*Tempted by Satan*- see more detailed commentary on Matthew 4.

*And he was with the wild beasts*- Suggesting He was as it were in Eden, and is compared favourably against Adam who failed his test when amongst the wild beasts. Paul in Philippians 2 and 1 Cor. 15 likewise compares the Lord's strength against temptation against Adam's weakness. Yet *therion* is the word repeatedly used in Revelation about the Lord's struggle with "the beast", and again we there encounter the motif of the wilderness. Indeed, the parallel between 'beast' and 'satan', the

adversary, is found both here in Mk. 1:13 and in Revelation- and hardly anywhere elsewhere. The Lord's struggle and victory against the beasts in the desert was therefore what is being repeated now in His struggle against the various beasts of political and spiritual opposition to His work, and His victory in the desert looks ahead to His final victory against the beast in the last day.

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

*And the angels took care of him- AV "ministered".* This is alluded to in Heb. 1:14, where we learn that Angels are spirits [He was led of the Spirit] who 'minister' unto us. Again we find the hint that His baptismal experience was a participation in ours; see on 1:12 *drives Him*. I would therefore conclude that the purpose of the Lord's baptism was not in order to obtain forgiveness of sins, but to enable Him in essence to be able to participate in our baptisms- the driving out of Egypt, the leading into the desert, the ministrations of Angels afterwards. And this was surely the reason for so many of His experiences.

1:14 *Now after John was delivered up-* The same word used about the betrayal / handing over of the Lord Jesus. He must have seen John's sufferings as a precursor of His own, as He makes explicit in Mt. 17:12: "Elijah came already and they knew him not, but did to him whatever they would. Likewise shall the Son of Man suffer by their hands".

*Jesus came into Galilee-* He had come down from Nazareth to be baptized by John near Jerusalem at the Jordan, and now He returns into Galilee. He took John's imprisonment as the cue to begin His public ministry. His 'coming' can be understood as the fulfilment of the idea of Messiah as 'He that shall come' (Lk. 7:19; Jn. 6:14; 7:28); Legion likewise speaks with that perception of His 'coming' (Lk. 4:34). The many references in John to the Lord's 'coming down' from Heaven would therefore refer not to any literal descent of a pre-existent being from Heaven to earth, but of His 'coming' in the sense of His public manifestation to Israel as their Messiah. Jn. 4:54 seems to describe the beginning of His public ministry as when He 'came' [s.w.] out of Judea into Galilee, which is precisely the same moment being described here by Mark. The Lord 'came' because He had been 'sent' (Jn. 7:28); that sending was therefore into Galilee to begin His public ministry, rather than a sending from Heaven to earth. He was sent from Heaven, i.e. from God, in that His sending was Divine; not in any literal sense. It would be literalism's last gasp to read this as

meaning that Jesus personally was in Heaven and was literally sent all the way 'down' to earth. He 'came' [s.w.] into the Jewish world not at His birth but at the beginning of His public ministry (Jn. 9:39); this was when light 'came' into the Jewish world (Jn. 3:19). He 'came' when He 'spoke' the word of the Gospel to Israel (Jn. 15:22 "If I had not *come* and spoken unto them..."). He came into the Jewish world in order to publicly bear witness (Jn. 18:37)- that bearing of public witness was when He 'came into the world'. John the Baptist had repeatedly taught that Jesus would 'come' after him (Jn. 1:15,27,30)- proof enough that His 'coming' was not at His birth but at the start of His open ministry. Jewish thought expected Messiah to 'come into the world', not through a literal descent from Heaven, but through public manifestation to the Jewish world (Jn. 6:14) and 'coming' from the family of David (Jn. 7:42 "Christ comes of the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem"). We can helpfully note how often we read of men 'coming' to Jesus in response to His 'coming' to them (e.g. Jn. 3:19,20- the light comes into the world, and men come to that light; Jn. 4:5,7- Jesus came to Sychar and the Samaritan woman came to Him; Jn. 5:40,43- "I am come... come to Me"; Jn. 11:20,29,30,32- when Jesus came, Martha and Mary came to Him; Jn. 12:1,9- Jesus came to Bethany and the people came to Him). This is the ultimate meeting between God and man- when we respond to His having 'come' to us in His Son. For He 'comes' to us today in knocking on the door of our hearts (Jn. 14:3,18,23).

*Preaching the Gospel of God-* The same word is used of how John 'preached' (Mt. 3:1), emphasizing the continuity between John's activity and that of the Lord Jesus whom he heralded. Mk. 1:15 and Mt. 4:17 say that the preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom was a preaching of repentance- and that is in fact good news. The good news of the Kingdom is therefore not simply information about a future good time to come on this earth, but [as the Lord's parables of the Kingdom make clear] the good news of a repentant life which can be lived right now in preparation for the future Kingdom on earth.

Mark's truncated term "The Gospel of God" perhaps intends to get over the idea that God is good news. For in so many religions, Judaism included, "God" or 'the gods' are generally bad news for sinful man. But the true God is good news for sinners.

1:15 *And saying: The time is fulfilled-* But later on in His ministry, the Lord taught that His time was not yet fulfilled (Jn. 7:8- the same words are used). The words are used in Lk. 1:20 concerning how each prophetic word has a time for its fulfilment. But as we learn from the prophetic word against Nineveh in Jonah's time, those times for fulfilment can be changed. The Kingdom could have come in the first century had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah. But instead they refused Him. And so the time of fulfilment was changed; and the content of the fulfilment likewise

changed. The "time" shifted from being the time of the Kingdom to the time of their crucifixion of their Messiah. We see how God's purpose is in some ways open-ended, such is His respect of human freewill decisions.

*And the kingdom of God is at hand-* In the sense that Jesus as King of the Kingdom could be called "the Kingdom of God". His life was the Kingdom life; to accept the offer of His life was therefore, in John's gospel, to receive the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. John's message was that the Lord was about to be revealed; "the Kingdom" was therefore "at hand". This was good news for all men because this message was of the forgiveness of sins; the imminent arrival of God's political Kingdom on earth is not good news for sinners, nor for anyone unprepared for it. The essential good news is of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus. Thus the good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21). Therefore the response to this good news was intended to be repentance.

*Repent and believe in the Gospel-* This might seem to be in the wrong order- for surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does. But the point is, life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place. Thus Rom. 6 teaches that we were once servants of sin... and we expect the sentence to conclude: 'But now you are servants of righteousness'. But it doesn't. We were once servants of sin but now we have obeyed the form of doctrine delivered to us... and are *therefore* servants of righteousness. Or we could have here an example of where teaching and belief of the Gospel in its fuller sense comes *after* conversion; this is stated explicitly in the great commission, which tells us to take the good news of the resurrection to people, to baptize them into the risen Christ, and then to teach them all things the Lord commanded (Mt. 28:19,20). We might expect 'repent and you will be forgiven'. Instead we read that repentance is to lead to believing in the Gospel; the good news of sin forgiven and that we can really have a place in God's eternal Kingdom on earth. The Gospel of the Kingdom is not therefore simply that the Lord shall come and establish an eternal Kingdom on earth. It is that we can really be forgiven and given the life eternal in that Kingdom which He shall establish at His return.

Mark gives no prior definition of what the Gospel of the Kingdom is (:14). And the LXX only contains the word once (2 Sam. 4:10). Is this an example of Mark assuming that his readers know what 'the Gospel' is? Or did the Lord speak in this way in order to beg the question from His audience: 'And what is your good news?'- and the rest of the Gospel record is the answer to that question. Another approach is possible; although the Greek *euangelion* is not used, the LXX of Is. 40:9; 52:7 and 60:1,2 clearly envisage a Messianic figure proclaiming the "good news" of

Israel's freedom from oppression and sin. The Lord seems to assume that His audience would know what 'good news' He had in view. Perhaps He was alluding to those Servant Songs in Isaiah, and saying that the good news is of "the Kingdom of God". And He goes on in Matthew to explain that this good news is of the life of forgiveness and grace lived out now, under the rulership of God, and coming to its material climax in His second coming and the literal establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

*1:16 And passing along by the sea of Galilee-* The Greek could mean that He walked around the entire lake. But He waited to call them, it seems, until the most inconvenient moment, just as the nets were in mid-air. And His call likewise comes to us in the midst of daily life.

*He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen-* Literally, 'salty ones'. The Greek can equally mean 'sailors'. The Lord must have had this in mind when He said that they were "the salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13). If we are likewise the salt of the earth in our influence upon others, we will find ourselves as the modern counterpart to those 'salty ones' who followed the Lord in His Galilee days.

1:17 - see on Lk. 9:59.

*And Jesus said to them-* It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, snap shotted in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life.

*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men-* The Lord had a program of education in view; their following of Him would mean that they would naturally reach out to save others. One aspect of our discipleship is likewise that we might bring others to salvation; otherwise, they swim off to their death in the sea of nations. We are saving people out of the world; for the sea refers to the Gentile world. And in that connection we see how the Lord considered the Jews to be no better than the sea of the Gentile world, and His disciples were initially to save Jewish people out of it. Separation from the world is therefore an essential part of our message and the result of our work with people. This was exemplified by the way the disciples themselves forsook their nets and [s.w.] also their own father (:18,20).

1:18- see on Mk. 10:28.

*And immediately they left the nets and followed him-* Mark uses this kind of word often, especially in his opening chapters, to create the impression of speed and urgency associated with the Lord Jesus. Immediacy of response is likewise a theme in Matthew. If our lives are in the realm of the Spirit, we will likewise experience the Lord's fast moving activity in our lives and hearts. Whilst each day can seem much like the previous day, the speed of His activity is incredible. And we are to respond immediately to it.

*1:19 And going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the boat-* The reference to a specific boat suggests that they had been in the boat from which Simon and Andrew had been casting their nets (:16).

*Mending the nets-* Which were presumably damaged. The implication was that the Lord would give them nets which would not break- the work of the Gospel will always succeed, ultimately. Hence the later acted parable of the nets which did not break despite the 153 fishes caught (Jn. 21). We can assume that they had just had a good catch, hence the need to mend their nets. It was at the peak of their career success, as it were, when they were feeling good about their work... that the Lord asked them to leave it all for Him.

*1:20 And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went after him-* The fishermen disciples were not, therefore, of the lowest social class. They owned a boat and a business large enough to employ workers. Their speed of response and forsaking it all is therefore all the more commendable, a challenge indeed to the middle class. And it is a witness to the power of the seed of the Gospel which John the Baptist had sown in them. Our preaching of the same message may likewise elicit radical response in people quite some time after we first sowed the seed in them. The middle class are uncomfortably, inconveniently challenged by the real call of Jesus; but it's worth reflecting that the majority of the people brought before us in the Bible as examples of faith and commitment were in fact not the poorest of the poor; they were from the middle class of their day. But much was expected of them.

*1:21 And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught-* The synagogue minister gave the lesson or sermon, but invited members of the congregation to contribute their thoughts. The Lord's message would therefore have been brief, but so powerful that it astonished people (:22).

*1:22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for-* The "they" may refer to the newly called disciples. They had not had previous exposure to His teaching; all they had received was the message of John the Baptist. Their immediate response was therefore on a fairly slender knowledge



base. The Gospel records twelve times record astonishment at the Lord's teaching. How could the passage of mere ideas from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew be so utterly astonishing, no matter how profound the content of the message? The Old Testament prophets likewise spoke God's word, but they were met with cynicism and mocking. Surely there was another factor which elicited such astonishment at His teaching, and I suggest it was in the way that His person was so perfectly congruent with the amazing ideas He was teaching. He was after all the word made flesh.

*He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes-* As noted above, this authority was based upon something. And I suggest it was not His miracles, but rather the congruence between His person and His word. The scribes indeed claimed authority. But the teaching of Jesus somehow had that authority within itself. It was not therefore just the nature or profundity of the ideas and content itself which were authoritative. The astonishment at the Lord's teaching in :27 was because of the actions of Jesus, in that case, in curing a man. The emphasis is perhaps to be placed on the word "having". He really did have authority, and He didn't need to make any claim to having it. The amazing challenge is in the parable of Mk. 13:34, where the Lord gives His authority to us His servants... We are not merely standing on a street lamely holding out tracts, offering them to anyone willing to come up and take one. We have an element of His authority if we are teaching His word in His Name; and thus Paul uses the word when speaking of his 'authority in the [preaching of] the Gospel' (1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9). And in our personal standing before the Father, we likewise have been given authority by the Lord Jesus to be the sons of God (Jn. 1:12). Paul realized we have each been given this authority, and uses the same word when warning believers not to let their "authority" (AV "this liberty of yours") cause others to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9).

*1:23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out-* As John speaks of the "synagogue of the Jews" and a "feast of the Jews". The Old Testament spoke of the feasts of Yahweh and *His* house; but Israel had hijacked God's religion and made it their own, just as we can in our day. And indeed the established churches appear to have done just that. "And immediately" suggests the cameraman as it were suddenly introducing a new person to us, with a jolt, "immediately". The impression is being created by the record of a fast moving ministry.

*1:24 Saying: What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are- the Holy One of God-* Notice the changes of pronouns from plural to singular. The supposedly spirit-possessed man was what we would call a man suffering from multiple personality disorder or a schizophrenic. Perhaps the dominant personality of the man was that which could say "I know who you are- the

Holy One of God". "You Nazarene" may suggest this man had met the Lord previously, and was one of the few who during the Lord's carpenter years had perceived that He was God's Holy One. Despite his affliction, in his deepest heart and most fundamental personality, the mentally ill man perceived what few others did- that Jesus was the Son of God. The man's less dominant personalities feared condemnation and destruction from this Son of God, and wanted Him to leave. The dominant personality recognized Him as Son of God, and maybe we are to imagine him saying "I know who you are..." said in a totally different tone of voice, as if another person was speaking compared to the ones who feared condemnation and didn't want closer engagement with Jesus. That same struggle, in essence, goes on in the mind of every person as they come to Jesus; a desire to pull back before it gets too serious and risky, and yet another desire to accept Him for who He is, the saviour Son of God. The Lord's apparent exorcism of the other personalities therefore left the man with who he really was in his heart of confused hearts- a believer in Jesus as God's Holy Son.

*1:25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying: Hold your peace and come out of him-* If as suggested on :24, the man had multiple personalities, the Lord is rebuking the less dominant personality. He speaks of course in terms which the man would have related to- of demon possession. The language of "rebuke" is appropriate to rebuking a personality; for one could hardly "rebuke" a person for being mentally disturbed. That is not a moral issue.

*1:26 And the unclean spirit, tearing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him-* This and :27 are recorded from the perspective of the onlooking crowd, with their beliefs and observations coloured by those beliefs. The video camera of the Gospel writer is as it were focused on them, and therefore the language of demon possession is used. The Greek for "tearing" is literally 'to make gasp'. It is appropriate to an epileptic convulsion or fit. But these incidents are not the work of indwelling demons; for they can be managed by medication today. The convulsion is described in the language of the day, as if there was a struggle within the man, and then in the man's panting afterwards we are invited to imagine a spirit departing from him. There was no actual "unclean spirit" involved; the cure was of personality, as noted on :24, it was as if one of the man's less dominant personalities now left him. And that is the kind of healing which the Lord through the Spirit can work today.

*1:27 And they were all amazed, so much so they questioned each other, saying: What is this? What a new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him!-* See on 1:22 *He taught them as one having authority.* We can see here one reason why the Lord 'went along' with their misunderstanding about evil spirits. They were left with the impression, within their albeit incorrect worldview, that His *teaching*

had the power to change radically, and to cause a spirit or mindset to depart from a person permanently. They thereby perceived that His words had power; the ideas in His teaching were of themselves powerful.

*1:28 And the report of him went out immediately everywhere into all the region of Galilee and thereabout-* "Report" in Greek is literally the hearing; as noted on :27, the Lord performed this miracle in terms of their understanding of 'spirits' in order that the hearing about *Him* might spread. And so it did.

'Galilee' literally means a circle or ring; the Greek here is a play in words, developing the idea that the Lord's fame spread around around Galilee, the circle, as if in concentric circles rippling out from a lake. This kind of literary device would be an aid to memorization, and is understandable if indeed tradition is correct in claiming that first century Christian converts were required to learn the Gospel of Mark by heart.

*1:29 And immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue-* "Come out" translates the same Greek word used in :28, "went out". This kind of repetition of original words is common in Mark, and was an aid to memorization. This word occurs seven times in Mark 1 alone (:25,26,28,29,35,38,45). An alternative word or method of expression could have been used in most of those cases, so the repetition is purposeful. See on :28.

*They came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John-* Perhaps we are intended to see a movement of the Spirit out of the houses of organized religion and into domestic homes, which became the house churches upon which the Christian faith was originally built. See on :33 *Gathered together at the door.*

*1:30 Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever-* Gk. 'on fire'. Clearly the unscientific language of the day being used to describe medical conditions, as was the language of demon possession.

*And immediately they told him about her-* He obviously knew about her condition already. For He is portrayed in the Gospels as the one who knew all things. The gospel records feature often this way they had of telling Him about things which we now can imagine the Lord already knew. The gospel writers are witnessing to their own immaturity, and this admission of personal lack of perception and weakness made their message attractive and compelling to their hearers. It is the same today.

*1:31 And he came and took her by the hand and raised her up-* Most of the other 46 uses of *krateo* in the NT imply an exertion of significant energy, as if hauling her up; rather than a graceful touch of her hand. There was an expenditure of effort by the Lord in order to heal a person (Mk. 5:30).

*And the fever left her, and she served them-* The response to the Lord's healing was and must still be to serve Him through serving His people. Again we note her immediacy of response, such a theme in the gospels [Mark especially] and the Acts.

1:32 *When evening came, and when the sun had set, they brought to him all that were sick and those possessed with demons-* This is saying the same thing twice. The point being made is surely that these sick people and their relatives waited with impatience until the Sabbath was ended before being healed. The contrast is with Simon's mother-in-law, who was healed on the Sabbath, within the dwelling place of Jesus, and worked in service immediately. There was no need for them to wait; and they must surely have reflected on that, having heard that the woman had been healed that Sabbath afternoon.

1:33 *And all the city was gathered together at the door-* The Greek *episunago* is related to the word for "synagogue"; see note on :29. A new synagogue had been formed in a house- that surely is the idea.

1:34 *And he healed many that were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons-* The Greek for "healed" is defined by some as meaning "to wait upon menially". The Lord performed His healings in a spirit of humble service. Another form of the word is found in Heb. 3:5, where Moses is described as a "servant". This is a far cry from the arrogance and self-glory of faith healers today. All that we do for others is to be done in a spirit of menial service; and this means that when they are deeply thankful to us, we will not in any sense be proud. It's just part of what we are called to do on the Lord's behalf, as His servants, doing His work in His power. To the glory of God. The "various diseases" demonstrated His wide ranging power; for healers tended to specialize in specific diseases, claiming power over particular [supposed] demons. But the Lord could heal all kinds of diseases.

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

*Because they knew Him-* It was the mentally sick who were the main group to 'know him to be the Christ' (Mk. 1:34 RVmg.). And it was a woman, and one with a history of mental illness, who was chosen as the first and leading witness of His resurrection. And women had no legal power as witnesses. The Greek here can be translated to the effect that

the Lord did not allow them to preach, which they wanted to do because they knew / recognized Him. In this case, knowing Him naturally leads to a desire to witness to Him. It's the kind of knowledge which cannot be merely theoretical. The Lord had to command those who knew Him not to speak out that knowledge (Mk. 1:34 cp. 44)- because people knew Him, they quite naturally wanted to preach it. One cannot truly know the Lord and not tell others of Him. This is the power of true knowledge, believed as it should be believed. But at this stage the Lord did not wish for yet further mass publicity. His focus was upon training the twelve and others who wished to understand His teachings. The miracles were it seems largely done when people came to the Lord for them, or when in the course of His preaching work, He encountered need [such as the hungry crowds who had listened to Him and were starving, even fainting, from lack of food].

1:35 *And in the morning, a great while before daybreak, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place; and there prayed-* Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning. The Lord's attitude to prayer was radical in itself. The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Perhaps He was motivated in His prayers by the lengthy implications of the fact that Yahweh is indeed one, and this demands so much of us.

1:36 *And Simon and they that were with him followed after him-* The Greek means to search for, implying they found Him on His knees in some discreet corner or behind a bush.

1:37 *And they found him, and said to him: All are seeking you-* Lk. 4:42 says that the crowd, "the people", were seeking Him. But so were Simon and the disciples- and they found Him, whereas the people did not. And that was an acted parable of how they sought and found, but the masses did not 'find' the Lord because they didn't really seek Him properly. The contrast, therefore, is between how the masses were 'seeking' the Lord; but the disciples "followed after Him" (:36), using the Greek word usually translated 'persecute'. Passing fascination level interest, mere religious curiosity, is not the real seeking for Jesus which will result in finding Him.

The contrast between the crowds and the disciples seems to be that they found Him because they searched for Him more passionately.

1:38 *And he said to them: Let us go elsewhere, into the next towns, so that I may preach there also; for this is why I came-* This could imply the Lord was unimpressed by the crowds searching for Him; see on 37 *All are seeking you*. The Lord's focus is presented as being upon preaching, teaching His ways, rather than upon meeting human need through miracles. This strongly impacts our thinking as to whether a purely social gospel is Biblical or even any kind of 'gospel'. The reason for His 'coming' was to preach- not to heal. Otherwise He would have remained where He was, seeing He had attracted droves of sick folks and likely more were now on the way to Him, to be bitterly disappointed that He had abruptly left first thing that morning. His 'coming [forth]' was not from heaven to earth; the same word is used of how He 'came forth' from Bethlehem (Mt. 2:6). It refers to His coming to Israel in His ministry. However, we can note that "I came" is the same Greek used in :35: "He went out". He may simply be saying: 'This is why I went out of the house early in the morning; because I must be on My way to take the Gospel further to other towns'.

1:39 *And throughout all Galilee he went into their synagogues, preaching and casting out demons-* See on 1:23 *Their synagogue*. The miracles, the 'casting out of demons', were to back up His preaching; hence "preaching" is mentioned first; see on :38.

1:40 *And a leper came to him, begging him as he knelt down before him, saying to him-* "Begging" is the Greek *parakleo*; and John's Gospel records at length the Lord's promise to be our *parakletos*, doing the work of comfort and entreaty, *parakleo*, for us. We see here the mutuality between a man and his Lord; both relate to each other in the same passionate way, in prayer [from our side] and in the Lord's gracious response [from His side]. The *parakleo* group of words are appropriate to both sides of the relationship.

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

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy

was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper of Mk. 1:40 lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If You will, You can [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

*You can make me clean*- The man realized the spiritual dimension of his affliction; for he asks not merely for healing but specifically to be made clean. The Lord replied that this was indeed His will. This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mt. 8:2; Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

1:41 *And being moved with compassion*- It has been observed that oral performance of texts like e.g. the Gospel of Mark was designed towards producing an emotional impact upon the hearers. We who read the same text and seek [quite rightly] to understand from it doctrine and practical commands for living somehow miss much of this; we inevitably subject the text to intellectual analysis, whereas the first century audience would have felt from their performance an appeal to convert, to accept, to feel something in response towards the Man Jesus who was presented there. Perhaps this is why a reading of the Gospels produces less response in us than that from a first century group hearing the same Gospels read / performed to them. Thus a first century reciter / listener would have paid special attention to the way Mark indicates the emotional state of Jesus as He said His words- angry (Mk. 3:5), compassionate (Mk. 1:41), snorting like a horse (Mk. 1:43 Gk.), troubled and distressed (Mk. 14:33). Likewise Mark's constant use of the term "immediately..." in his early chapters would've created a sense of urgency, fast flowing narrative, perhaps matched by the reciter speaking quickly.

*He stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him: I will. Be cleansed*- The Lord responds within the terms of the man's request: "If You will, You can make me clean". We note the man sought cleansing above mere healing; his spiritual need for cleansing was paramount in his mind. We likewise should ask for material blessings motivated by spiritual concerns. The Lord could have cured the man in multiple ways, but he chose to touch the man, making Himself technically unclean; although it could be argued that the cure was so immediate that it was therefore debatable as to whether the Lord had actually touched a leper or not. Surely He did it the way He did to provoke such questions; for the process of questioning led to them becoming the more aware of the fact that the

Lord's touch had indeed cleansed the man. And the whole question of ritual uncleanness was of course put in the spotlight. The Lord was and is unafraid to associate with the very dirtiest of human conditions and situations. There was no revulsion from them, as there is not today. The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

*1:42 And immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was made clean; and-* For this whole incident, see commentary on Mt. 8:1-4. The immediacy of the cure upon touching the Lord raised all kind of questions for the legalistic mind, as to whether the Lord was made unclean or not (see on :41).

In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done here. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease.

1:43- see on Mk. 1:41.

*He immediately sent him away with a stern warning-* As noted on :45, the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal; see on :39.

*1:44 Saying to him: See you say nothing to anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing the things which Moses commanded, for a testimony to them-* The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness first and foremost to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on Mt. 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done



by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

*1:45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news, so much so that Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but stayed in deserted places-* If we put the stress on the word "openly", we are left imagining Jesus somehow disguising Himself in order to enter the towns. This is the reason why the Lord so sternly charged the healed man not to spread the news (:43); the stampede of people wanting healing meant that the Lord was unable to perform His most important ministry, which was to preach rather than to heal; see on :39.

*But still they came to him from every quarter-* This was a small foretaste of people from every direction coming to Messiah. The Lord's life experiences, like ours, were a living exemplification of the future Kingdom experience.

## MARK CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Mk. 6:2. For this section on the healing of the man carried by four, see on Mt. 9:1-6.

*And after some days, when he entered again into Capernaum, it became known that he was in the house-* The "that" is recitative, so the sense is 'It was reported- He is in the house!'. This was the level of gossipy attention paid to the Lord, which must have been so irritating: "He has gone into the house, and is there!". Again we get the impression that the Lord was not interested in mass public meetings and healings; His focus was upon training the twelve and teaching the Gospel. It seems He was almost hiding away in the house. Not surprisingly, because He left there because of the attention caused by His miracles, and He had been hunted down even in the deserted places by those eager for a miracle (1:45).

2:2 *And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even about the door; and he spoke the word to them-* "Gathered together" is literally 'synagogued', and this continues the idea noted on 1:29,33 that the Lord was effectively setting up a new Israel, with synagogues in homes, in public places, under fig trees- anywhere, where the Lord's followers gathered together. We can be sure that the "house" where he was was likely that of Simon, and the crowds of people wanted healings. For they had descended on that same house for healing in 1:33. But instead of reading that He healed them, we read that He preached to them. Mark is stressing that this was the Lord's essential ministry. The fact He chose to heal just one person was because He perceived deep faith in those who brought him, and also because He wished to make a point out of that healing- but again, harnessed to the objective of teaching the people.

2:3 *And they came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them-* The Greek for "carried" means literally to be taken up or away, and reflects the Hebrew term used for the bearing away of sin. And :5 confirms this association by stating that it was through the faith of the four friends that the man's sins were forgiven. This is the huge horizon of potential which there is for us in our efforts for others- we can even play a role in the Lord forgiving them their sins. This lifts the concept of pastoral work far beyond mere doing of good works. See on Mk. 7:32-35.

2:4 *And when they could not come near to him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was; and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed whereon the paralyzed man lay-* This was all done in faith, and by doing this the Lord saw their faith (:5). "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

2:5 *And Jesus seeing their faith, said to the paralyzed man-* This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22). Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others.

*Son, your sins are forgiven-* The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

2:6 *But some of the scribes sitting there questioned in their hearts-* Mt. 9:3 "said within themselves".

Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

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

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to.

2:7 *Why does this man speak so? He blasphemes. Who can forgive sins but one- God!-* The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

We should deeply note at this point that the thoughts of men in their hearts are known to the Father and Son, and have been recorded publicly here in these records for many centuries.

*2:8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit what they questioned within themselves, said to them: Why do you question these things in your hearts?*- Perhaps we're helped to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings by Mk. 2:8: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So Mk 2:8 gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator.

*2:9 Which one is easier to say to the paralyzed man?*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier for Me'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:10).

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

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ

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

2:10 *But so you may know*- He cured the man sick of a palsy that the onlooking, cynical Scribes *might know* that He had power to forgive sins. He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publicly known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4).

*That the Son of Man*- The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

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

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

2:11 *I say to you! Arise, pick up your bed and go to your house-* The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

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

2:12 *And he arose and immediately picked up the bed, and went out in full view of them all. They were all amazed and glorified God, saying: We have never seen anything like this before!-* The immediacy of the cure, especially in response to the faith of third parties, was utterly unknown amongst those who had seen too many fake healers attempting to heal illness. "In full view of them all" is another hint that the miracle was for teaching purposes; the Lord was surrounded by people eager for healing, and instead He taught them.

2:13 *And he went out again by the sea side; and all the crowd went to him and he taught them-* The imperfect tenses mean they kept on coming

to Him, and He kept on teaching them. The interest in miracles had given way to interest in His teaching, just as the Lord had intended. His location by the lake side was perhaps in order to require some effort by the people to come to Him; and there were no houses large enough to hold the crowds coming to Him anyway.

2:14 *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus-* Mt. 9:9 calls him Matthew. Matthew's preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events. Whilst personal testimony has a role, the Gospel is about Jesus and therefore "we preach not ourselves" but Christ as Lord and Saviour. If the focus is upon us rather than Him, then we are failing dismally. The humility of the Gospel writers when they refer to themselves is highly instructive. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi, strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (Mt. 9:3).

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

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



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

*And he arose and followed him-* Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him (another example of Mark highlighting immediate response to the Lord's call). As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better translated in this context "on").

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

*2:15 And it came to pass, that as he was dining in Levi's house-* Matthew's account is vague about whose house it was; he just says "the house" in his record. We note Matthew's humility in his recounting of the Gospel, that he leaves the identity of the house vague. He had no desire to boast that he had once hosted Jesus within his private home. Humility and self-abnegation must really be the lead characteristics of all tellers of the Gospel.

*Many tax collectors and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples. For there were many, and they followed him-* Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them, even though to eat with a person was seen as a religious act of fellowship. The Lord's open table was and is scandalous to the religiously minded. Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the

same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

2:16 *And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples: How is it that he eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?*- To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

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

*They that are whole have no need of a doctor-* Literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are whole*'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshiping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (9:13). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

The Greek word for "whole" or healthy is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated. Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they need no repentance*'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was

a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

*But they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance-* It was the disciples, including Matthew, who had only recently been 'called' (Mt. 4:21). They were not the most righteous of people. The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call to or towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on Mt. 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

*2:18 And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came, and said to him: Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?-* Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all

until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

*2:19 And Jesus said to them: Can the sons of the bride chamber fast-* John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

*While the bridegroom is with them?-* The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord is saying here that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

*As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast-* Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews

of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work (Mk. 2:19). But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

2:20- see on Jn. 14:2.

*But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them. In that day, they will fast-*

The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *pairō* which has just been used ("take up your bed" Mt. 9:6) and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (Mt. 9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-

parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return-Mt. 9:15]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes "your voice to be heard on high". Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced

that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

2:21 *Nobody sews a piece of unshrunk cloth*- The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples (Mt, 9:14 and see note there on *fast not*). The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publicly worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in Mt. 9:17. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

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

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt.

9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibres are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

*Onto an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse-* "Pulls away from" is Gk. *schisma*, used elsewhere about divisions between people, especially the Jews, concerning Christ (e.g. Jn. 7:43; 9:16). We note the contrast with unrent, untorn garment of the Lord Jesus which even in His death was not rent. Acceptance of the way of Christ means that there will come schism with the old; and more positively, seamless unity is only possible between those who have totally given their lives and way of thinking to Him and His way.

"Made worse" in its NT usage has a moral sense. The division is made more evil. In the context, the Lord was addressing John's disciples who had come under the influence of the Pharisees (9:14). He is saying that they must fully commit to Him, or else the schism between them and the Jews and them and Himself will only become worse and more destructive. There could be no middle way between Christ and orthodox Judaism; the early church tried it, as the NT letters demonstrate, but in the end, it came to a sad and bitter end, and the permanent division of the garment. And this is how all schisms go- unless there is a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus and His teachings, the end finally will be a bitter, destructive rending. The pre-existing, initial schism between persons (cp. that between John's disciples and Christ) will only be made worse unless there is a total surrender to the Lord's ways. In all the unhappy church history which most of us have experienced, that is proved true time and again.



Likewise there are those who seek to hide their faith in societies and social situations where it is costly to go Christ's way; but ultimately, they have to choose one way or the other. The rent is made worse. A city set on a hill cannot be hid by its nature.

*2:22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins-* A clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

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

*The wine is spilled-* The same word for "shed" (Lk. 20:20). Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

*And the wineskins are ruined-* The point is twice emphasized. The bottles are 'broken' or shattered, and they also "perish". The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation.

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

*2:23 And it came to pass, that he was going on the Sabbath day through the grain fields; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of grain-* Luke says they rubbed them in their hands; Matthew says they ate. Here we have a superb example of the Gospel writers being in artless

agreement with each other, in a manner which would not have been achieved by an uninspired record. The force of "began..." might be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

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

The Pharisees had reasoned themselves into a position whereby plucking heads of corn whilst walking through a corn field on the Sabbath was regarded as reaping. When the Lord was questioned about this issue, He didn't reply as most of us would have done: to attack the ridiculous definition of 'work on the Sabbath'. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter.

The Lord's men were accused of 'threshing' on the Sabbath because they rubbed corn in their hands (Mk. 2:23-28). The Lord could have answered 'No, this is a non-Biblical definition of working on the Sabbath'. But He didn't. Instead He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

*2:24 And the Pharisees said to him: Look, why do they do on the Sabbath day what is not lawful?*- A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

2:25 *And he said to them: Have you never read-* Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

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

2:26 *How he entered into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the showbread, which it is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and gave also to those that were with him?*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's

later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency... all means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4). Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

*2:27 And he said to them: The Sabbath was designed for man, and not man for the Sabbath-* Mark alone records this. The allusion is surely to the fact that at creation, man was made [NEV "designed"] just before the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made afterwards, so that man could rest. The Sabbath, the seventh day, came *after* man's creation on the sixth day. It was therefore for man. It was for man's blessing, and therefore it was wrong to add legislation to it which made it an utter pain for man rather than a blessing. We can almost read in an ellipsis- the Sabbath was made for man's [blessing]. Man was not made in order to keep a pre-existing legal code about the Sabbath. The laws and institutions of God were intended for human *blessing*; and yet human legalism has meant that so often, they become a curse and frustration to man. Man is not made or designed to keep legal codes- man was not made to keep "the Sabbath"

as it was being presented by Judaism at that time. The Sabbath was made for man's blessing, not in order to trap him. This same argument can be applied to so many of the trappings of religion, from dress codes to statements of faith.

2:28 *Therefore the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath*- The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord *on* the Sabbath". Mark in :27 adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word. This could be the inspired comment of the Gospel writer, rather than the actual words of the Lord. Because the Sabbath law was made for human benefit and blessing, man is therefore above the Sabbath; and so "the Son of Man", the quintessential and supreme human, the Lord Jesus, is "Lord of the Sabbath". We see here an incidental proof of the utter humanity of the Lord Jesus; if something is true for man generally, then it is all the more true for Him, because He was also a man, although the supremest of all men. He could legally infringe the law, just as men like David did, because He understood that the intention of the law was for human blessing. If that intention was fulfilled, there was no need to keep the letter of the law. This of course can too easily become a slippery slope towards disobedience; and yet the other extreme is a legalistic obedience to the letter of a law, which results in not achieving what that law intended, which is blessing to man. "Lord even of the Sabbath" can be rendered 'Is also lord of the Sabbath'; as if what were true for man generally is all the more for Jesus. As David and the Lord's disciples were masters of the Sabbath, rather than being dominated by it and the associated legislation; so even more was the Lord Jesus Himself, as the archetypical man, "the son of man", also lord of the Sabbath.

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

# MARK CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there who had a withered hand-* His right hand, according to Luke. His own strength and ability to act was withered. The hand had "withered", suggesting this was a result of human accident or sin, rather than genetic.

3:2 *And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day- so that they would have an excuse to accuse him-* "Would heal" is literally 'Will heal'; this typical change of tense is to encourage us to see the situation played out live before our eyes, as it were; entering into the question as we do when watching a movie: 'Will He heal him... or not?!?'.  
An "excuse to accuse" is a legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

3:3 *And he said to the man that had the withered hand: Come here-* The man was apparently not next to the Lord; he was probably lurking at the back of the hall or outside it.

3:4 *And he said to them: Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil? To save a life, or to kill? But they remained quiet-*

When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are.

He said that if Had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. See on Mk. 7:11.  
The Lord said that He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision

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making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

3:5- see on Mk. 1:41.

*And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man-* The way the Lord didn't just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts, and finally broke down and wept over Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger of eternal damnation*" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind...? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

Almost every reference to Israel's hardness [s.w. "blindness"] of heart is to their hearts having been made hard / blind. Their attitude of mind was confirmed by the work of God's Spirit; just as Pharaoh hardened his heart, and had it hardened by God in response. But the Lord grieved for this condition, whatever the cause.

*Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored-* Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people.

AV adds: "Whole as the other". This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

3:6 *And the Pharisees went out-* Again, an emphasis on physical movement. We imagine Mark's camera covering their departure from the synagogue.

*And immediately took counsel against him with the Herodians-* Nothing formal is necessarily implied by the word. Perhaps we are to imagine them gathering in a tight circle somewhere outside the synagogue.

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

3:7 *And Jesus with his disciples withdrew to the sea; and a great crowd from Galilee and from Judea followed-* Several times we read of the Lord withdrawing from the public, or at least trying to (Mt. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; Mk. 3:7; Jn. 6:15). But Mark especially references this, at least 11 times. We get the impression that He made public appearances, did some healing and teaching, and then 'withdrew'. The Gospel records focus much on the last week and months of His ministry. The first three years has relatively little recorded- but there is a lot of information about some very long, action packed days. We can assume too easily that these recorded days were typical. But perhaps they were not. There are probably no more than 20 days' events recorded- out of the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. One possibility is that the rest of the time, or much of it, He spent simply teaching the disciples. If the Lord maintained the same tempo and intensity of His recorded activity throughout the three and a half years, it surely would've been almost impossible to have avoided His being propelled to political power by the masses. This suggestion of limited public activity makes better sense of the note we made on Mt. 11:20, that the majority of His miracles were performed in three small villages in Galilee. That also must provide some context to the



comment here that He healed 'all' the multitudes on this occasion; He healed 'all' amongst the crowds who were in need of healing, not every member of the crowd.

*3:8 And from Jerusalem and from Idumaea and on the other side of the Jordan and about Tyre and Sidon, a great crowd, hearing what great things he did, came to him-* There would have been many Gentiles in this crowd. Their attraction was because of the miracles, the "things [which] he did", rather than His teaching. Primitive societies are always attracted to healers, and this healer appeared to be the best ever.

*3:9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, in case they crushed him-* "Crushed" translates the Greek word usually used for 'affliction'. There was the real danger of serious damage to Him. Not just because of the crush of people, but perhaps because of the anger there would be from those who feared they would not get cured. Once the Lord started healing, it was hard to stop- for there would be huge anger and disappointment from those who felt they had missed out. And the line waiting for healing was unending. To draw a point beyond which 'no more' was going to provoke anger.

*3:10 For he had healed many; so much so that as many as had illnesses pressed upon him that they might touch him-* This could suggest that the Lord's physical touch was required for the healing to happen. This would explain the physical danger to the Lord, with perhaps thousands of sick people and their carers desperately trying to touch Him. His pushing out to sea in the boat was therefore a master stroke; because it signalled an end to the healings and a focus upon teaching. It also provided Him with literally a platform from which to speak, with the hills and cliffs behind the shore providing a natural amphitheatre which would have amplified His voice.

*3:11 And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried, saying: You are the Son of God!-* Again, the 'spirits' or 'demons' are put for the [supposedly] demon possessed. It was those afflicted with illnesses which were not understood, the isolated and despised, those with mental illnesses, who perceived the Lord for who He was. Their heightened states of perception in some areas enabled them to make this connection. The falling before Him was in worship.

*3:12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known-* The Lord charged the healed people to not make Him known, in the sense of not advertising their experience of healing, because He wanted to focus on teaching without the distraction of the crowds who sought only healing. Yet His commands about this were disobeyed. Clearly if He were

addressing literal spirits, then He failed to have power over them. For they were disobedient, in going around praising Him for His healing. The whole insistence upon reading the "unclean spirits" literally simply breaks down. For evil spirits are not supposed to utter the praise of the Lord Jesus. The language only really makes sense if were read the "spirits" as referring to persons who were once ill but whom the Lord healed.

*3:13 And he went up into the mountain and called to himself whomever he would; and they came to him-* In the same way as Moses was called up into the mount to receive his Divine commission, so the Lord Jesus called up to the mount His disciples- implying that they, who represent all of us, were now a new Moses (Mk. 3:13). Moses was thus an example that challenged those from a Jewish background especially. He was no longer to be gazed at with incomprehension as to his greatness and intimacy with God; he was to become the realistic pattern for all followers of the Lord Jesus, who would meaningfully emulate His closeness to God.

*3:14 And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach-* It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with him and that he might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

The idea of course may also be that they were firstly to be with Him, trained by Him; and then sent out alone to preach.

*3:15 And to have authority to cast out demons-* This is in the context of the Lord's concern that the crowds were sheep with no shepherd, which I suggested was an allusion to Moses' words of Num. 27:17 (see on Mt. 9:36). Moses asks for God to raise up another to do his work, and God gives him Joshua- and is told "You shall invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20). So the Lord is here treating the disciples as if they are His replacement, going out to do His work, just as the later body

of Christ are to do. We have in this preaching tour they are sent on some sort of foretaste of the great commission.

3:16 *And Simon he surnamed Peter-* Note this is not the record of the choosing of the twelve, but rather of their commissioning and being sent out. The list is broken up in Matthew into pairs, perhaps because they were sent out as six pairs. Simon was anything but rock-like, but the Lord named him Peter, 'rocky'. He perceived the ultimate stability in Peter's faith, despite all the ups and downs He had. And He sees to the core of each of us too.

3:17 *And James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James he surnamed Boanerges, which means, sons of thunder-* James and John were to be the "sons of thunder", a Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain. See on Mt. 16:19. The Lord was establishing a new Israel with a new synagogue system.

3:18 *And Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas and James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus and Simon the Cananaean-* Bartholomew is apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51. "Simon the Cananaean" doesn't mean 'from Canaan' but a *kananites*, a zealot. We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types of person, of whatever accent and formation.

3:19 *And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. And then he went home-* "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

The Lord's "home" may have now been in Capernaum. That He can be described as having a "home" is an essay in His utter humanity.

*3:20 And the crowd gathered again, so many people that they could not so much as eat bread-* The Lord appeared to have taken the disciples into the "home" He lived in at Capernaum (:19). But the people invaded the home, desperate for healing, to the point that they could not even eat. We can now better understand why the Lord didn't want the healings advertised; it serious derailed the function of His whole ministry.

*3:21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying: He is out of his mind-* His natural family were no longer in the family home (:19), because it had been taken over by the Lord's new family. "They were saying" to the critical Jews, now eager to check out the Lord's relatives, that He was crazy.

As Paul wrote to his unspiritual Corinthian brethren, he was doubtless hurt at the thought of their opposition to him; yet his mind flew to the similarities between himself and his Lord being rejected by *his* brethren (Mk. 3:21 = 2 Cor. 5:13).

When she stands outside the house asking to speak with Jesus, Mary is identified with her other children who considered Jesus crazy. Jesus says that His mothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. This must have so cut her. There is a rather unpleasant connection between Mk. 3:32 "they stood without" and Mark 4:11 "unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And further, Lk. 13:25 speaks of how the rejected shall stand without [same words] knocking and asking to speak with the Lord. Mk. 3:19,20 RVmg. says that Jesus came home- i.e. to the family home, and it turned out that the interested visitors took the house over, with His relatives, mother, brothers, sisters etc. left outside (Mk. 3:21 RVmg.). No wonder the point was made that He now had a new family; and His natural family, Mary amongst them, resented it.

The incident of Mary and her other children coming to Jesus is inserted by Mark in the context of his record that the Scribes concluded that He had "an unclean spirit". In that same context, we read that Mary and His brothers concluded that He was "beside himself" (Mk. 3:21,22). The language of demon / unclean spirit possession is used in the Gospels to describe mental rather than physical illness. The Scribes thought that Jesus was demon possessed; His family and mother thought He was mentally ill. The two thoughts are parallel, as if to imply that His family had been influenced by the prevailing opinion of the elders about Him. The Lord responded to the Scribes by warning them that they ran the risk of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by saying this of Him. And it would appear that His own mother may have been running the same risk. This is such a tragic difference from the young, spiritually minded woman who was so convinced that her Son was indeed Messiah and the uniquely begotten

Son of God. And it happened simply because she was influenced by what others thought of Jesus, rather than what she had learnt from the word and experienced herself. It's a powerful warning to us.

In Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. The parallel Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

3:22 *And the scribes that came down from Jerusalem said-* Perhaps the very ones who had come from Jerusalem to be baptized by John; see on 1:5.

*He has Beelzebub, and by the prince of the demons he casts out the demons-* "The Prince of the demons", *archon*, "the first", would imply that Beelzebub was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons (Mt. 12:27). And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

*3:23 And he called them to him, and said to them in parables: How can Satan cast out Satan?- 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "if Satan...". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.*

But the argument is about casting out of *demons*, yet here 'satan casts out satan'. One thing we learn from this use of language is that beliefs about 'Satan', demons and the casting out of demons were very vague and poorly defined. And that is how it is to this day with those who believe in the literal existence of 'Satan' and demons. When pressed for definition and a more connected theology, they flounder.

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Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now

taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

*3:24 And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand-* Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself (Mk. 3:23-26) in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom. Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

*3:25 And if a family be divided against itself, that family will not be able to stand-* The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

*3:26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end-* The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire

family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated". This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

*3:27 But no one can enter into the home of a strong man and spoil his goods-* When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than satan (Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

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'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). See on Mt 12:28 *by the Spirit*. And note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18). The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong.

*Except he first bind the strong man*- The binding of the strong man was already in process, for the Lord's miracles were proof that his goods were being spoiled and he was powerless to stop it. But the ultimate binding of the enemy was in the Lord's death- and several times the records of the Lord's passion use the word to describe how He was 'bound'. Surely He was encouraged by the intended paradox- that through His binding, the power of sin was being bound. The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding

of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

*And then he will spoil his home-* AV "Spoil his goods". The same word is used in Mt. 11:12 of how the Kingdom of God is being "taken by force" by those entering into it. The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12).

We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even

fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.

If indeed sickness was caused by Satan's power, then the Lord's miracles were a spoiling of his goods. The language here is clearly parabolic- including the reference to 'Satan'. But the miracles were an invitation to others to come and share in the victory the Lord Jesus had won over the 'strong man'.

3:28 *Truly I say to you: All the sins of the sons of men shall be forgiven and their blasphemies with which they shall blaspheme-* His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others... See on Mt. 10:29.

3:29 *But whoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is never forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin-* Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation. See on Rev. 3:17.

People were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst

a person is in the position of so strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (Mt. 12:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

*3:30 He said this because they had said: He has an unclean spirit-* They had seen the Holy Spirit in operation; and they could not deny it. But they were wilfully choosing to call this the work of an "unclean spirit".

*3:31 And then came his mother and his brothers and standing outside, they sent a message to him, calling him-* Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. Here in the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren... for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

3:32- see on Mk. 3:21.

*And a crowd was sitting about him, and they said to him: Look, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you-* Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "thy mother and your brothers are outside looking [seeking] for you", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for you"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary looked for for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so

easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity... In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention. See on Mk. 6:3.

*3:33 And he answered them, saying: Who is my mother and my brothers?-* In a fiercely family based society, such radical redefinition of family was remarkable, and the Lord was labouring His radical point lest there be any misunderstanding. He was creating a new family, based around hearing and doing His Father's will; there was a new Father, God, and those who did His will were His children. The nature of the scene portrayed here seems to suggest that in His case, as in so many others afterwards, the new spiritual family was separate from the family of origin; for they were here outside the house. And we must bear in mind that 'house' meant not only a building but a family. This gives new meaning to the way that Paul and James (especially James) so love to address their brethren as "my brothers" (James 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12). Their brethren in Christ were really their new family. And it should be the same for us. The divided state of the body of Christ today is surely a result of over-familiar, over-privileged believers failing to grasp the wonder of the fact that others have come into the family by conversion into Christ. In believing communities comprised of first generation converts, there is generally a far greater sense of brotherhood.

*3:34 And looking round on them that sat round about him, he said: Behold my mother and my brothers!-* Another mark of an eyewitness account is found in this reference to looking round. Given the loss of family many had experienced, this visual image would've remained in their memories, to be drawn upon in the hard times of rejection by family of origin. The Greek *epi* translated "toward" could strictly mean 'over'- as if the disciples were sitting near to Him. For it was they, rather than the general audience, whom He knew were doing the Father's will. The Lord implied that those who did God's will were closer to Him than His physical mother or sister or brother (Mt. 12:48-50). It has been observed that "in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family". And so it is in many parts of the world today.

*3:35 For whoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother-* Another allusion back to the crunch line of the Sermon on the Mount, that the true community would be comprised of those who did the will of the Father in Heaven. The Lord spoke of Himself as 'doing the will' of the Father, supremely in His death on the cross. Heb. 10:7,9

speaks of the Son 'doing the will' of God in dying on the cross, and the passage then goes on to appeal to us likewise to do that same will (Heb. 10:36). And it is God who will work in us through the Spirit to empower us to do that will- if we ourselves so wish (Heb. 13:21). The very fact the Lord calls us brethren here is seen by the Hebrew writer as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

# MARK CHAPTER 4

4:1 *And again he began to teach by the sea side. There gathered to him a very great crowd-* "Gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

The Gospel records give more information about the day on which Christ told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in his ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt. 12:22-13:23; Lk. 11:27; Mk. 4:10). Various types of people heard his words; the immediate context in Mt. 13:2 is that "great multitudes were gathered together unto him". The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to Christ's sowing when he first "went forth to sow" in his ministry.

*So he entered into a boat and sat in the sea, and all the crowd were gathered along the shore-* Of course He didn't literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus' voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheatre provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted [\'flowed', AV mg.]" - to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

Think about how Mark speaks of Jesus "sitting in the sea" teaching the people on the shore. All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence.

As noted on 3:9,10, an offshore boat was required because of the huge press upon the Lord in order to get a miracle. In order to get the people to listen to Him, it must have been necessary for Him to ignore human



need for the time being and not do any more miracles- in order that His word might be spread. This was His priority, far more than addressing human material need.

*4:2 And he taught them many things in parables, and said to them in his teaching-* The unusually large crowd (:1) were attracted to the Lord for various reasons, not least the hope of miracles. And He now tells them a parable to the effect that out of all those who encounter His word, only a minority would truly respond. Perhaps this parable is recorded out of all His teachings from the boat, because time proved it so true to that mass of humanity who heard Him preaching.

According to the parallel in Matthew 12, this was the Lord's first parable; and it marked a turning point. Now He was intentionally using parables exactly so that the majority of Israel would not understand. The Lord seems to have concluded that the contemporary generation was wicked and bound for condemnation; they had rejected John's message after having initially responded to it, and had rejected Him. This is now the first time that we read in Matthew of the use of "parables", and it seems to be in direct context with what He has said to Israelite society at the end of Matthew 11. He is now speaking to them in this form so that they will be confirmed in their disbelief. The Kingdom principles which He had so clearly expressed in the Sermon on the Mount now become "mysteries" of the Kingdom (Mt. 12:11); instead of the Kingdom which could then have been established had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Kingdom principles would work quietly from within until such time as the Kingdom were to be politically established at a far future date. No longer do we read of the Kingdom coming 'near' and being 'heralded'. And the themes of most of His subsequent parables in Matthew include Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He spoke *things* to them, but in parables. This of itself suggests that He used parables so that people would *not* understand, as is made explicit in Mt. 12:11,12. His parables were not, therefore, simple stories with an obvious meaning. They may appear that way to us who have some understanding of their interpretation, but that was clearly not how they were understood by most of the initial audience. Even if they thought they understood them, it's made clear in Mt. 12:11 and :12 that they didn't. The change in style is due to His conclusion that that generation were condemned and had refused John's ministry and therefore Christ's message. From now onwards He would not be giving them any more- He was cloaking the message in parables, and explaining them only to the minority who had properly responded.

*4:3 Listen! Behold, the sower went forth to sow-* The Lord's teaching in Mt. 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (Mt. 13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher,

or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read "a sower" (followed by the AV), others "the sower" (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: 'A sower, the sower, went out...'. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why "the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come"; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went forth" is the same Greek word has just been used in Mt. 12:1 to describe how Jesus had 'gone forth' out of the house to preach by the lakeshore. Although multitudes were there listening, the Lord knew that only a few would be good ground for the word. The word is several times used of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... for *therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.), but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Luke's account stresses the seed: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

4:4 *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside-* The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks

of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot - an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk. 10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

*And the birds came-* Lk. 8:5 adds that first of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower

parable "shall be *taken away* even what he has" (Mt. 13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catches away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catches" the sheep (Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

*And devoured it-* The same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the* seed- Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

4:5 *And other fell on the rocky ground, where it had not much earth-* The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of

persecution and tribulation (Mt. 12:21)- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

*And immediately*- The immediacy of response is not wrong; immediate response is a great theme of Mark. The good ground also features immediate response. The problem with many is that they do not continue that immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's

appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

*It sprang up*- The idea is that they germinated. The seed of the Gospel began to grow- the multitudes had begun to respond to John's message. The same word is used in the next verse to describe how the sun then 'sprung up'. After response to the word begins, there will be trouble and testing. Just as Israel's Red Sea baptism was immediately followed by tribulation and testing. The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

*Because it had no depth of soil*- John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). These people had only a surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of Christ and His work.

4:6 *And when the sun had risen, it was scorched*- Literally, burnt. John the Baptist had presented a powerful logic- either baptism by fire by the Jesus whom he preached, or being burnt up with [figurative] fire at the last day (Mt. 3:10-12). The Lord clearly has that in mind here- those who had refused John's message about Him were even now burnt up, for judgment in its essence begins now, according to our response to the word of Christ.

*And because it had no root, it withered away*- The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

The same word for "withered" is used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever,

whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

*4:7 And other fell among the thorns-* This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's later parable makes that clear- the good seed brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (Mt. 13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in Mt. 12:22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

*And the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit-* The later parable explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up' (Mt. 12:26); the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (Mt. 12:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish 'world', making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

*4:8 And others fell into the good ground-* The next parable is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

*And yielded fruit, growing up and increasing; and brought forth, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold-* Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God's ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible.

Mk. 4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in two ways:



1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.

2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows that; the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and Christ's words to the rich, righteous young man: "'If you will be *perfect...*' sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. Christ wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly Christ sees others; because we can't know. The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently

without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide, rather than sowing like any normal sower would do. This taught that even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. To reach "all men" must be our brief; all types of men and women, including those who are obviously going to respond poorly. Yet the parable talks of one grain of corn that yields one hundredfold (Mk. 4:8). Any farmer would pick up on this impossibility. An average yield in 1st century Palestine was about ten fold (This has been carefully worked out by R.K. McIver 'One Hundred-Fold Yield', *New Testament Studies* Vol. 40 (1994) pp. 606-608). What kind of response was *this*? What kind of grain of corn? Clearly, the Lord Jesus- who described Himself in John's record as the grain of corn that was to fall into the ground and bring forth much fruit. But the other grains of corn yielded 30 and 60 fold. This was quite amazing response too, totally unheard of in practice. Was it not that the Lord was trying to show us just how radically His Gospel can transform human life? Amazing fertility was a feature of the future Messianic Kingdom (Amos 9:13; Jer. 31:27; Ez. 36:29,30)- it's as if the Lord is saying in the sower parable that the abundance of the future Kingdom can begin in human life now.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is huge- but then so is the loss. It's as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord's also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

Note how the three types of wasted seed and poor ground are matched by three types of response on the good ground. This feature of triads (features occurring in threes) may not necessarily have any meaning, but it may simply be part of a structure designed to aid memorization- which was the initial usage of the Gospel records.

I have shown in the commentary above that growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

In fairness, this parable can be read another way. In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface.  
4:9 *And he said: Who has ears to hear, let him hear-*

Seeing that the next verses show the Lord considered Israel generally to no longer have ears to hear (see Matthew), this would seem an appeal to the disciples to perceive what He is saying, even though the majority of Israel cannot. Therefore He asks them later to "*Hear* the parable" (Mt. 12:18)- for He knows they do have ears to hear. But even they had to make a conscious effort to hear- those with ears are asked to hear. Understanding, in the sense Jesus uses the idea, doesn't come naturally but requires effort.

Luke adds: "As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8). The Lord so wanted their response. "As he said these things, he *cried*, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8 RV; Jn. 7:37). The very muscles of the Lord's face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed... our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that hath ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anti-climax of the next verse, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in Lk. 8:10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God". There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "As he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

4:10- see on Mk. 3:14.

*And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked him about the parables-* The Lord's grace to His men is reflected in Mark's record of how the twelve were confused by the Lord's parables. He responds that He speaks in parables so that "them that are without" would not understand; but His followers would, He implies, "know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And yet it's immediately apparent that the disciples were equally confused by the parables. We sense the Lord's frustration with this: "Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?"- i.e. 'If you don't understand this parable, it means you won't understand any of them, which makes you equal with the crowd of those outside of Me, whom I'm seeking to leave confused'. And we note how straight away Mark notes, perhaps in sadness and yet marvel at the Lord's grace: "But without a parable spake he not unto them [the disciples]: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mk. 4:10-13,34). Mark, or Peter writing through Mark, could look back in wonder. They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had

privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us.

This question is understandable if this was the first parable the Lord spoke; see on Mt. 12:1. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

*4:11 And he said to them: To you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those that are without, all things are done in parables-* The Lord explained that parables only remained incomprehensible to "them that are without". That phrase seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power. Those "without" in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand "without" begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those 'without' in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord's teaching, for whom it's all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn't mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires. See on Jn. 16:25.

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

*4:12 That seeing, they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn again and it should be forgiven them-* Understanding and perceiving the meaning of the parables would result in conversion, repentance and forgiveness. Moses persevered because he *understood*. "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Ps. 119:35) is one of many links in David's thought between understanding and obedience. See on Mk. 7:29. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John the Baptist which became the basis of their subsequent total blindness and deafness to Jesus. If the word sown isn't responded to further, or only partially so, then there remains only a

hardening. We must respond, and immediately- and be led wherever the word leads us.

The Lord Jesus spoke the parable of the sower so that the Jews "by hearing... shall hear, and... not understand" (Mt. 13:14), which is quoting from Is. 6:9,10 concerning Israel hearing the preaching of Jesus during his ministry. This would explain the present tenses in Mk. 4:14-20: "These *are* they by the way side... these *are* they... which *are* sown...". That prophecy evidently had fulfilment at Isaiah's time; the point is thereby established that prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

4:13 *And he said to them: Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?*- Not understanding was characteristic of those sown by the wayside, according to the interpretation we have in Matthew 13. We can therefore imagine a note of deep concern in the Lord's voice at this point. For the Lord has just made clear that not understanding Him is a conscious, wilful intellectual act; and people shut their eyes so that they will not understand, lest it demand too much from them personally (Mt. 13:15). The wayside category are not, therefore, merely predestined not to understand. It's not that they were just in the wrong place, exposed to the wrong teachings and religious culture, and therefore they did not understand. For anyone who hears the word or seed of Christ, refusal to understand it is a conscious choice. It may not appear like that, but the Lord has said in Mt. 13:15 that it is. By 'understanding', the Lord means the understanding which brings forth fruit. He is here redefining 'understanding the word', making it refer to something fruitful in practice. He spoke against a religious culture in which spirituality was seen in terms of being a microscopic student of the Old Testament and word by word, verse by verse, coming to the right theological interpretation. Many of us were raised in a similar environment. And the Lord here is redefining 'understanding the word' away from the sense of 'correct exposition' towards 'responding faithfully in practice, bringing forth fruit'. The bad ground, therefore, involved an element of choice to be like that. We showed on Mt. 13:4 that there were 'wayside' persons who *did* respond; our location in terms of culture, environment, psychology etc. is *not* an inevitable barrier to responding to the word which we hear. This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn. 5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one", the Jewish satan. In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, the Lord twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and

immediately with joy receives it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). And the Lord was concerned that the disciples were in the same category.

4:14 *The sower, sows the word-* In terms of a 'this equals that' interpretation, "the sower" is left without interpretation. The seed is the word, but "the sower" is left as "the sower"; but the Lord Jesus and any preacher. The purpose of the parable is to focus not upon the sower but upon human response to the word.

4:15 *And these by the way side, where the word is sown, represent those who, when they have heard, have Satan immediately come-* Note that the parable was spoken the same day as the discourses of Matthew chapter 12- see Mt. 13:1. The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

*And take away the word-* Mt. 13:19 "snatches away". The same word had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as responsible for the scattering of the sheep. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

*Which has been sown in them-* Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the

story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

*4:16 And these in like manner are they that are sown upon the rocky places, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy-* So long as he 'believes for a while' (Lk.). Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

*4:17 But they have no root in themselves and only endure for a while. Then, when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they stumble-* The house built on sand was destroyed by a flood, an oft used type of the second coming and day of judgment. The equivalent in the sower parable is "when the sun was up... they were scattered" (Mt. 13:6). The sun is a symbol of both Christ's return and also of "tribulation or persecution!" (Mt. 13:21). It seems that Jesus is teaching that our response to the word now is in effect our judgment seat; if we do not properly grow by it, in time of trial (the sun rising) we will spiritually die. Therefore when "the sun of righteousness" arises (Mal. 4:2) at the day of judgment, we will be "scorched" or 'burnt up' (Gk.). There are other examples of where a man's attitude to God's word in this life indicates his position at judgment day (e.g. Acts 13:46). In the same way as we call upon a reserve of word-developed spirituality in time of trial (the "moisture" of the parable), so we will at judgment day. When Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22), perhaps he was alluding to the parable of the sower, where the Lord taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul



knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

4:18 *Others are represented by those that are sown among the thorns. These are they that have heard the word-* One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a tare (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the tare category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed

"fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt. 13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted.

4:19 *And the cares of the world-* In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world.

*And the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in-* There are not a few Bible passages which present materialism as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated

by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing*, surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

*Choke the word-* Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

*And it becomes unfruitful-* Mt. 13:22 has "he becomes unfruitful". The types of ground represent the hearts of various categories of people. We expect to read that *the seed* becomes unfruitful. But the seed never does, it never of itself loses its power and life. The seed of the word, of Jesus who is *the seed*, becomes the person. The word is to be made flesh in us as it was to perfection in the Lord (Jn. 1:14). See on 13:6 *withered*. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these

things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.

*4:20 And these are they that were sown upon the good ground: such as hear the word and accept it-* "Understand it" (Mt. 13:23), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15). In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (Mt. 13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

*And bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold-* One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up

into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

4:21- see on Mt. 5:15.

*And he said to them: Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a lamp stand?-*

The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden. He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him.

We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them.

The Greek article in "the lamp / lamp stand / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The

light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

4:22- see on 1 Cor. 14:25.

*For there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret but that it should come to light-* The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason

why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The whole process of covering truths before revealing them is not because God plays hard to get. It is because the process of discovery is for our benefit.

4:23 *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear-* See on :9.

4:24 *And he said to them: Pay attention to what you hear. What measure you use shall be applied to you, and more shall be given to you-* The measuring and giving as we have measured and given is used in Mt. 7:2 regarding the outcome of the final judgment. But it is not that our works shall as it were earn us a place in that Kingdom. The measure we use is applied here to what or "how" (AV) we hear. The context is the parable of the sower; how we hear God's word is critical to our eternal destiny. The outcome of judgment day will be directly proportionate to how far and in what way we have 'heard' the Lord's word. Hearing is doing; intellectual purity of understanding is not in view here.

4:25 *For he that has, to him shall be given-* This is a clear statement of the upward spiral which we can experience. What we 'have' in our commitment to His word (see on :24) will be added to. The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort and application to God's word, but through the gift /grace of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (Mt. 13:9). Mark speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adds to "shall be given" the idea of 'given in abundance'. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

*And he that has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he has-* The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand 'what a man has' as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John's preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and

hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

In the sower context, those who appear to have been committed to the word but have now fallen away (the seed on the rocks, wayside and amongst thorns) will find that their time of apparent commitment to it was nothing; they have nothing if they did not endure to the end, and what they appeared to have will be taken away from them.

*4:26 And he said: So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth-* The Greek tenses suggest a one-time sowing, contrasted with regular sleeping and rising (:27). As King of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus did at times give Himself the title "the Kingdom of God". John's Gospel often mentions that the gift of the life of the Lord Jesus is also that of "eternal life"; His life, the kind of life He lived, His spirit, is that which believers shall eternally have. The sower in the preceding parable of the sower refers to the Lord Jesus sowing the seed of God's word; although all those "in Him" are likewise sowers of the word. Perhaps "the earth" refers specifically to the land of Israel, as often in the New Testament. But it could be that this parable is an extension of the parable of the sower, and the earth / ground in view is specifically the good ground, which brings forth much fruit. This parable is then a reflection on the wonder of salvation from the Lord's viewpoint.

*4:27 He sleeps and rises, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he does not know how-* The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower, who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "he does not know how" (with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit unmeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase.

The Lord was limited in understanding. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or as here, the mystery of spiritual growth), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

*4:28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear-* As noted on :25, these comments are added as caveats to the parable of the sower, lest the impression should be given that all is required is correct exposition of God's word. For this was the great fallacy of Judaism. He who "has" in hearing / understanding / obedience is "given" the more (:25); the hand of grace is a major element in achieving that person's salvation, rather than their own



unaided intellectual efforts. And so here, there is an element of mystery to spiritual growth, which even the Lord Himself did not understand; the earth "by itself" appears to produce the fruit. It is not simply a case of receiving the seed into good ground. There is another element in the whole business of spiritual fruition.

*4:29 But when the grain is ripe, immediately he puts forth the sickle, because the harvest comes-* He is closely watching our spiritual growth, as the farmer watches the wheat and then *immediately* begins to harvest it once the humidity and growth is just right. This is the enthusiasm with which the Lord watches our growth, not just individually, but as a community, i.e. the whole field. As the growth is still in some sense a mystery to the farmer, so it may be to the Lord (Mk. 4:26,27); we grow, "he knows not how". This could be taken as an eloquent essay in the Lord's own limitation of knowledge. But the point is, once there is sufficient spiritual fruit, then the harvest is put in. This means that we cannot fix a calendar date for the Lord's return; we have conditions to be met, rather than dates to be waited for. Once the fruit is on the fig tree, then that generation shall see the Lord's return. I suggest this refers specifically to spiritual fruit amongst repentant Jews; and in this may lie the significance of the seed being sown upon the earth / land of Israel (:26).

*4:30 And he said: To what shall we compare the kingdom of God? Or in what parable shall we set it forth?-* The Lord has explained that He is going to teach in parables so that Israel shall not understand. The point had arrived in His ministry where the window of their opportunity was starting to close. So it could be that He is asking the disciples to think up parables, a casing within which to place the things of the Kingdom. The "we" would therefore refer to Him and His disciples. They apparently made no response, and so the Lord went on to share another of His comparison parables. 'Think up a modern day parable...' is no bad exercise to use as a pastoral tool today.

4:31- see on Jn. 12:23-25.

*It is like a grain-* Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so

wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

*Of mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the earth, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the earth-*

Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

Gk. *mikros*, the tiniest, the least. Mark adds that it was the tiniest of all seeds *in the earth* (Mk. 4:31). It was the tiniest seed known in the land- and the term often refers to the land promised to Abraham. It was the tiniest imaginable seed. And it would grow into the greatest imaginable tree. The point has been made that orchid and other seeds are actually smaller than mustard seeds (H. N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952) p.61). But the Bible is written from the perspective of its original hearers, it never claims to present global scientific truth, and the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to the Lord's audience.

4:32 *Yet when it is sown, grows up-* The phrase in Greek appears rather strange until we recall Mark's theme of immediacy of response. He envisages the sown seed growing up immediately, in a moment.

*And becomes greater than all the herbs, and puts out great branches so that the birds of the sky can lodge under the shadow of it-* Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. It is (Mt. 13:32) "the greatest"; but the mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand

speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on Mt. 13:33; Rev. 17:18.

Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *mezas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *meza*; but the greatness of the tree was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.

There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

*4:33 And with many such parables he spoke the word to them, according as they were able to understand it-* The Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to understand it", not as He was able to expound it. He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics.

There is tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right: wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if

placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

*4:34 Without a parable he did not speak to them, but in private he explained all things to his own disciples-* As noted earlier, this marked a changeover in His ministry. He *only* spoke to Israel in parables; there was no more of the plain teaching of the Kingdom as found in the sermon on the mount. They were expected to have grasped that. If they did not, then it was too late. He also designed things so that He explained the truth of things to those who came to Him wishing to understand, rather than those who simply wanted to experience healings.

*4:35 And on that day, when evening had come, he said to them: Let us go over to the other side of the lake-* "That day" refers to the longest day recorded in all the Gospels.

*4:36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him-* "Just as he was" could imply He had fainted or was unwell. He would have endured immense nervous pressure from the ministry of this very long and active day.

*4:37 And there arose a great wind storm and the waves slammed into the boat, so much so that the boat was now filling-* The changes of tense in the Gospel records suggest an eye witness telling the story. "And there arises a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling" (RV). But the rest of the account in the surrounding verses is in proper past tenses- e.g. "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said..." (:39). The impression we have is of the author getting carried away with the memory of the event, and telling it as if it's happening. And this is especially fitting if in fact the Gospels were performed live rather than coldly memorized as prose.

The word used for the storm in Mt. 8:24 is also translated "earthquake". "Arose" uses the same Greek word as found in Mt. 8:26 "there was / arose a great calm". Just as easily as God can raise up a crisis, He can raise up the resolution to it.

4:38- see on Mt. 8:25; 20:32; Jn. 10:13.

*And he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke him, and said to him-* The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship (Mt.). Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique

the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

The Greek for 'sleep' could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

'Awoke' is literally, to raise up. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

*Teacher, do you not care that we perish?*- His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It's so reminiscent of a child's total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent's love and self-sacrifice.

Matthew records that they asked Him to save them, because "We perish!". The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again, He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.

4:39 *And he awoke and rebuked the wind-* The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to describe how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

*And said to the sea: Peace! Be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm-* His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mt. 8:26; Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming

death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

4:40- see on Mt. 8:26.

*And he said to them: Why are you fearful? Do you still not have faith?*- Fear and unbelief are again connected in Rev. 21:8. The unbelief refers ultimately to disbelief in our salvation, fear of condemnation; see on 8:25 'We perish'. The question as to *why* they had little faith (Mt.) echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord's words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke's record has Him upbraiding them: "Where is your faith?", as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: "O you of *little* faith...". Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: 'O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?' (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for "little" faith is also translated 'almost'; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented "Have you not yet faith?" (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb "believe" without an object (e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: 'Believe *in*



*what or whom?'. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.*

4:41 *And they feared exceedingly, and said to each other: Who then is this?- "What manner of man is this" (Mt. 8:27); what sort of man is this (Gk. potapos), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons(potapous) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.*

"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

Jesus does not proclaim Himself, and yet He expects us to base our lives

around Him. This is yet another paradox. Clearly we are intended to reconstruct Him from our repeated and sensitive readings of the Gospels. We in our day must read the Gospel records, portraying Him as they do from four different angles, and seek to reconstruct Him in our own minds as a person. His actions spoke loudly [and in this He is a pattern to us in our witness]. When He stilled the storm, the disciples marvelled: "What manner of man is this?", knowing full well that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the *Yahweh* Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much much more than that. But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

*Even the wind and the sea obey him!*- The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

# MARK CHAPTER 5

5:1- see on Mk. 10:28. For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in [The Real Devil](#). See too commentary on Matthew 8 and Luke 8.

*And they came to the other side of the sea-* The Gospel records, Mark especially, often paint a broad scene and then zoom in upon the person of Jesus. Mark does this by using a plural verb *without an explicit subject* to paint a picture of the disciples or crowd generally; and then follows this by a singular verb or pronoun referring specifically to Jesus. Here are some examples: "They came to the other side... and when He had stepped out of the boat" (Mk. 5:1,2); "when they came from Bethany, he was hungry" (Mk. 8:22); "they went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples..." (Mk. 14:32). The grammatical feature is more evident in Greek than in English. If the writer of Mark had been a cameraman, he'd have taken a broad sweep, and then suddenly hit the zoom to focus right up close upon Jesus Himself. This is what is being done with words, and it reflects the Christ-centeredness of the whole narrative and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospels are transcripts.

*Into the country of the Gerasenes-* The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

5:2 *And when he got out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit-* "Immediately" suggests the man was waiting for Him; although :6 says that Legion ran to the Lord from far away, which would make the "immediately" here relative, and intended to create an impression of fast moving action. From his isolated hideouts on the cliffs, he had seen the boat traversing the lake so many times. And he was convinced that within it there was the Son of God. "With an unclean spirit" appears to contradict the idea that he had a legion of such spirits within him- until we accept that this is just the language of the day for mental illness. We are not reading here about literal spirits. See on :7. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, ""Unclean spirits" is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of

Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

5:3 *Who had his dwelling in the tombs; no one could any more bind him, even with a chain-* A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression:

- Israel were "A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments" (Is. 65:3-4).
- Legion was always "in the mountains"- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).
- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.
- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob
- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?".
- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land".

- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being "destroyed" in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed "great things" (Mk. 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called "great things" (Ps. 106:21).

5:4 *For he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him-* See on :3 for the connection between Legion and Judah. He had "often" been restrained, in efforts to cure him. He therefore needed some assurance that the cure from the Lord Jesus was going to be permanent, and the rushing of the pigs over the cliff to their permanent destruction would have been a reminder of that.

5:5 *Always, night and day, in the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and cutting himself with stones-* A psychological approach to the self-mutilation [which is a classic symptom of mental illness] would be to understand it as him trying to stone himself, convinced he was unworthy and deserving of condemnation. No surprise, in this case, that the presence of Jesus lifted that sense of condemnation from him, and the miracle of the pigs was therefore performed to assure him that his sin really had been removed and condemned by drowning in the sea [a figure of condemnation in Mt. 18:6 and Rev. 18:21. 33]. The French social scientist René Girard commented at length upon the curing of the demoniac. He took the gashing of himself with stones as being representative of the man's desire to stone himself, and he observes the phenomena of "autolapidation" (self-stoning) as being common within the mentally disturbed. But he observes further that the pigs running over the cliff has "ritual and penal connotations" in that both stoning and being thrown over a cliff were common methods of execution in primitive societies (René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 176. The same points are made in Jean Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac", in Roland Barthes et al, eds., *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) pp. 57-84). We recall how the townspeople tried to execute Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff (Lk. 4:29). And yet Jesus turned the man's fears on their

head; for the pigs, representing the crowd who wished to stone the man and throw him off the cliff, are the ones who are thrown over the cliff by Jesus. The crowd therefore suffer the execution which they wished to inflict upon the victim. Thus "the miracle of Gerasa reverses the universal schema of violence fundamental to all societies" (*Ibid* p. 179). Now we understand why Jesus declined Legion's request to follow Him on His mission, but insisted he instead return to his own society and live at peace with them. For Jesus had taught the man that the crowd he feared were no more, the lynch mob he obsessively feared had themselves been lynched over the cliff. The man begged that the demons *not* be cast into the sea (Lk. 8:31) in the sense that he himself feared being cast over the cliff into the sea by the mob. But that fear was taken away by Jesus; for it was the demons, the lynch mob which he feared, the Roman Legions, which he saw represented by the pigs, hurtling to their own destruction over the cliff.

5:6 *And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him-* Yet the man is described as "immediately" meeting the Lord; see on :2. His worship suggests He had heard and processed the works and teaching of the Lord, and come to the conclusion which the Lord never stated in so many words- that He was the Son of God. The Lord's style was to let His audience join the dots and come to that conclusion; and this mentally disturbed homeless man was one of the few who did so and saw the picture. It was His illness which stopped Him credibly and usefully proclaiming that; and so the Lord cured that dimension of the man.

5:7 *And crying out with a loud voice, he said: What have I to do with you, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I solemnly implore you by God, do not torment me-* See on :6. He was one of the few who joined the dots and saw that the Lord was God's Son; yet he feared condemnation, which is what "torment" spoke of. It was his mental illness which was largely responsible for that paranoia about condemnation; and the Lord healed him of it.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons' (see on :2)- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk. 5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29).  
"He [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "My name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

*5:8 For Jesus had said to him: Unclean spirit, come out of the man!*- The man's fear of condemnation ["torment"] was triggered or restimulated by the command to the 'unclean spirit' to come out of the man. Legion assumed that he personally was going to be condemned if the "unclean spirit" was condemned which he supposed was within him. But the Lord was seeking to help the man see a difference between himself personally, and his mental illness, the "spirit" or mind within him which was paranoid about condemnation. And so the Lord went along with the man's self perception, and in terms the man understood, showed beyond doubt that that spirit of fear had been cast out. Perhaps John reflects on this incident when he writes that perfect love casts out fear, because fear is associated with "torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), which is just what the man was obsessed with fearing (:7).

*5:9 And he asked the spirit: What is your name?*- The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to

Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*And the spirit replied: My name is Legion. For we are many-* I have outlined in :3 how Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The 'band' of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome's Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-political and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor



of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness. In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46). So often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if

their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analysed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967)). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be

understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (*Ibid* p. 147). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (Newheart, *op cit* p. 84).

5:10 *And he pleaded earnestly with him not to send them out of the country*- This is the man's fear of condemnation, noted on :8. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country*" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They begged him not to order them to go into the abyss*" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by

invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons' as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

5:11 *Now there was there on the mountain side a great herd of pigs feeding-* Mt. 8:30 "Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding". The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The man saw himself as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them (Mt. 8:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. See on :8 for the man's paranoia about condemnation, although he believed in the Lord as God's Son and worshipped Him as such. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips.

5:12 *And they pleaded with him, saying: Send us into the pigs, let us enter into them-* Mt. 8:31 adds: "And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out". The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). Legion was obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (Mt. 8:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on Mt. 8:30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on Mt. 8:32). He correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring Legion that his fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day; and this addressed the man's paranoia about condemnation noted on :8. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. Legion had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. He realized that meeting Him was meeting his judge. And he ask that the pigs bear his condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once Legion had as it were received his condemnation, he had passed from death into life.

Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was

surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "The demons besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (:12,13); the Gadarenes "began to beg him to depart out of their coasts" (:17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "begged him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (:18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure, with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

5:13 *So he gave them permission*- Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this? Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6);

indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

The madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system... A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male... presented with a three month history of gradual change in behaviour in the form of irrelevant talk ... On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked... Delusions of persecution and reference were present... he accepted the illness but attributed the cause to evil spirits... histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae... Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in

terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

*And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the hill into the sea and were drowned in the sea-* Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

5:14 *And they that fed them fled and told it in the city and in the country. And they came to see what it was that had happened-* "What had happened" was the cure of Legion; they came to investigate, and saw the cured man (:15). As Jews they were not supposed to be keeping pigs; they realized they could say little against the Lord's action, for what they had been doing was illegal. It would have taken some time for the news to spread to "the city and in the country"; so we can assume the Lord sat with the cured Legion for some time, even days, teaching him further.

5:15 *And they came to Jesus and saw him who had been possessed with demons, that previously had the legion, sitting, clothed and in his right mind- and they were afraid-* When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind". His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

The "fear" of the people was perhaps related to their bad conscience about keeping pigs. The parable of the prodigal son associated Jewish pig keepers with those who needed to repent, and for whom the Father was eagerly waiting to welcome back home. Those people were in the same position as Legion; being now aware of the Lord's Divine power, but fearing condemnation. They actually needed the same basic healing which the Lord had given Legion in curing him of his complex about condemnation. Indeed the case of Legion speaks to so many believers today, who believe in and even worship the Lord as Son of God, but who are obsessed with a fear of final condemnation.

5:16 *And they that saw it described to them what had happened to him that was previously possessed with demons, and about what had happened to the pigs-* Apart from the loss of their pigs, what had happened was good news. Fear of condemnation, to the point of paranoia, really could be cured by the Lord Jesus; the demons of doubt and fear really could be cast out, and the miracle of the destruction of the pigs was dramatic visual evidence of this. But when faced with this, the people feared and didn't want that good news.

5:17 *And they began to beg him to depart from their borders-* "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in Mt. 8:31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (Mt. 8:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (Mt. 8:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (Mt. 8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (Mt. 8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved.



Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

5:18 *And as he was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with demons pleaded with him that he might go with him-* Motivations for involvement in evangelistic work vary. This man was separated from his family and society, for he had been violent and abusive to them. It would have been far more convenient for him to just leave them and join the peripatetic ministry of the Lord Jesus. But the Lord realized that the healing of relationships was a fundamental outcome of acceptance of the Gospel; and He wished this process to at least be given a chance in this case. And so He established a principle which many have struggled to accept: ministry to family and local society is even more important than joining in mobile missionary work.

5:19 *But Jesus did not permit him. Instead he said to him: Go to your home, to your family, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you-* See on :18 and :20. We must "do" the Lord's will (Mt. 7:21), but the Lord also 'does' for us by His grace ("mercy"); our 'doing' is in response to His 'doing' for us. The same word is used in Jn. 4:1 (also Acts 15:17) of how the Lord 'did' or "made" disciples. That was the end point in view; the "great things" done were not just the cure, but the making of a disciple.

5:20 *And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled-* This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples

themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

**Mk. 5:19**

Go to your *house*

unto your *friends* [relatives]

*tell* them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"- by personal demonstration to individuals]

how great things

the *Lord* [*i.e. God*] has done for you

and how he had mercy on you.

**Mk. 5:20**

He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]

He goes to *strangers*

He "*publishes*"

how great things

*Jesus* had done for him

[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

5:21 *And when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great crowd was gathered to him; and he was by the sea-* Just as Legion

"immediately" met the Lord on His arrival on the shore (:2), so on going back to "the other side", there was a great crowd waiting for the Lord "by the sea", on the shore. Jairus must have had to push himself to the front of that crowd (:22). According to the parallel in Mt. 9:18, the Lord began teaching the crowd immediately. Again we see that teaching was the primary focus of His ministry, for surely the crowds were expecting healings. The impression is given in Matthew that the ruler was begging the Lord for the healing of his daughter, but instead the Lord delayed responding in order to complete the teaching He was giving about the vital need for total transformation if we have received the new wine. He felt His message was that important. We also notice something which we see several times in the Gospel records- the Lord appears to not respond to human need, to even be deaf to it. For a while. The reason for that, both then and now, was surely to pique the intensity and urgency of the requests.

*5:22 And there came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name-*

Matthew omits his name- perhaps because his Gospel first circulated in areas local to Jairus where the mention of his name could've led to persecution? The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter (see on :21). He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

*And seeing him, he fell at his feet-* This kneeling (Mt.) was in worship; just as Legion had done on the sea shore the other side of the lake. The same formula is used in Mt. 8:2- the leper worshipped Jesus in that he expressed faith in His power to cleanse (also in Mt. 15:25). The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped

Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

*5:23 And implored him earnestly, saying: My little daughter is at the point of death-* Mt. 9:18 "My daughter is even now dead". The Greek could carry the idea of 'for now, she is dead' (see the usage in Mt. 3:15; Jn. 13:7; 16:12,31; 1 Cor. 13:12 etc.); in this case, the man believed her death state was only temporary, until the resurrection he believed Jesus would achieve.

*I beg you to come and lay your hands on her, that she may be made whole and live-* The man "came" to Jesus, and now Jesus 'comes' to the man; the same Greek word is used twice. The impression is given of a mutuality between the Lord and those who come to Him in faith.

*5:24 And Jesus went with him; and a great crowd followed him, and they pressed upon him-* This verse zooms in close on the body language and physical movement of the characters, as if the author was the cameraman on the scene. Truly we have eye witness accounts in places like this. The image of the Lord Jesus following a man [stressed in Matthew] is unusual, as readers are accustomed to the disciples following the Lord, not Him following men. The point perhaps is that He is responsive to human need and prayer in a sense controls Him, according to His will of course. The picture is of the man racing ahead, so eager to get home. This sets the scene for the interruption to the journey, and serves to heighten the sense we get of his frustration with the woman who is taking up the Lord's time, when for him, every second counted so crucially.

*5:25 And a woman, who for twelve years had an issue of blood-* Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing.

*5:26 And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was nothing bettered but rather grew worse-* This is another similarity with Legion, who had suffered from many failed attempts to cure his conditions. Getting 'worse and worse' is the picture of all people outside of Christ, and specifically of the spiritual state of Israel at the time (Mt. 9:16; 12:45; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:20). The Mosaic system of Judaism could not "better" humanity (s.w. Jn. 6:63; Rom. 2:25; Gal. 5:2; Heb. 4:2; 13:9). Perhaps the implication is that the woman represented Israel, who like Asa had trusted in physicians rather than the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Job's 'friends' had many Judaist characteristics and reasoned in the same way as orthodox Judaism; and they were "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4). The woman was bankrupt and desperate. This was how all were under the Law; the only answer was to throw themselves upon the Lord Jesus.

5:27 *Having heard the things about Jesus, came from the crowd behind him-* The scene is being developed from :24, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

*And touched his garment-* Mt. "the hem". Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Distraction</b>	<b>Resumed Focus</b>
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.

He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

5:28 *For she said: If I touch but his garments-* Mt. 'she said within herself'. She had the same wrong notion as many Orthodox and Catholic believers have today- that some physical item can give healing. The Lord corrected her by telling her that it was *her faith-* not the touch of His garment- that had made her whole (Mt. 9:21,22). As so often, He had focused on what was positive in her, rather than the negative. We know that usually the Lord looked for faith in people before healing them. Yet after this incident there are examples of where those who merely sought to touch His garment were healed (Mk. 6:56; Lk. 6:19). They were probably hopeful that they would have a similar experience to the woman. One could argue they were mere opportunists, as were their relatives who got them near enough to Jesus' clothes. And probably there was a large element of this in them. But the Lord saw through all this to what faith there was, and responded to it. It is perhaps not accidental that Mark records the link between faith and Jesus' decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5). When we fear there is interest in our message only for what material benefit there may be for the hearers, we need to remember this. To identify wrong motives doesn't mean that we turn away; we must look deeper, and hope more strongly.

*I shall be made whole*- The Greek *sozo* is that usually used for 'saved'. She had a wider desire for not only healing (for which other Greek words could have been used) but for salvation on a wider level.

5:29 *And immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her illness*- The immediacy of the Lord's cure contrasted sharply with all human attempts at curing an internal disease. "Healed of her illness" is literally "healed of her flogging". For that is how the Greek translated "illness" here is usually translated. We sense an allusion to the prophecy that by the Lord's floggings / stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24). The woman becomes thereby typical of us all. Our stripes / floggings become His; and thereby, through the representational nature of His life and sacrifice, we are healed.

5:30 *And immediately Jesus, perceiving in himself that the power proceeding from him had gone forth, turned towards the crowd and said: Who touched my garments?*- This gives an insight into the huge outflow of energy from the Lord when He healed people. As noted on :29, His healing of people was on account of His total identification with them; and each healing was a living out in essence of the cross even during His life. The Lord of course knew the woman had touched Him; but He didn't want her to just have a secret faith. He wanted her to 'come out'; and He engineers circumstance in our lives likewise, so that we have to become a city that is set on a hill.

5:31- see on Mk. 14:70.

*And his disciples said to him: You saw the crowd pressing upon you and you ask, Who touched me?*- The gospels are transcripts of how the disciples spoke the gospel message. And yet they are shot through with the disciples' recognition of their own weakness, and thereby their message was the more appealing and convicting to their hearers. Here, they paint themselves as foolish and inappropriate; they record their mocking of the Lord in the same section in which they record the scorning of the Lord by unbelievers in :40.

5:32 *And he looked around to see who had done this thing*- Mt. 9:22 "But Jesus turning and seeing her...". Again the emphasis is upon recording the physical movement of the persons involved in the scene, so that we can visually reconstruct it. The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

5:33 *But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had been done to her, came and fell down before him and told him all the truth-* We see another connection with Legion, who feared condemnation and yet also fell before the Lord in worship. The Lord knew her history; but "the truth" to be told forth is a personal confession of our hopeless spiritual history, and the Lord's saving by grace.

5:34 *And he said to her: Daughter-* Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

*Your faith has made you whole-* The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord (Mk. 5:34; Mt. 9:20)- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood" whose faith hath made her whole [or, saved]. It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

*Go in peace and be free of your illness-* The woman was fearful of condemnation, and so the Lord wished her peace, with God. Her full healing was only now pronounced, although she had felt it already within herself. The Lord required public confession from her; and so He does today.

5:35 *While he was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying: Your daughter is dead. Why do you trouble the Teacher any further?-* Luke adds: "There comes one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master" (Lk. 8:49). We naturally ask: *who* was this "one" along with the "some" mentioned by Mark who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus "the Master", which is how Matthew records the form of address. And it is the disciples who ever show themselves concerned at others 'troubling the master'; every time they try to turn people away from Him on this basis [the children, their mothers, the Phoenician woman etc.], He makes a point of accepting and working with those whom they sought to bar from Him. The implication is



that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn't have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later.

*5:36 But Jesus, not heeding the word spoken, said to the ruler of the synagogue: Fear not, only believe-* The implication could be that the Lord, just like us, was momentarily tempted to heed that bad news and falter in faith. But as so often, His words to Jairus were spoken effectively to Himself. This shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours... then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge... then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant 'nicespeak' which results in judgment from others unless it's used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

5:37- see on Mt. 17:1.

*And he permitted no one to follow him-* We see here the Lord's amazing force of personality when He wished to use it, just as He walked through the crowd in Nazareth who wished to throw Him off the cliff. He sent away the inquisitive crowd, just as He sent away the crowd after the miraculous feeding. He used the same power in commanding the mourners to leave the home (:40; Mt. "Leave!").

*Save Peter, James and John the brother of James-* These were clearly the inner three whom He especially sought to educate further.

*5:38 And they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue-* Again we have the impression of the cameraman following Him, shooting from behind. Mt. 9:23 "When Jesus came into... He saw...He said". This is the process of usual human experience, perception and response to

perception. It's yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity. The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13, came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns, areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

*And he saw a tumult, and many weeping and wailing greatly-* Mt. 9:23 "The flute-players and the crowd making a tumult". If the flute players had already been called, the implication is that the girl had been dead for some time. This places a question mark over the ruler's claim that his daughter had only just died (Mt. 9:18 Gk.). All through these accounts we see the Lord's grace. The man exaggerated, just as the woman thought that merely touching Christ's clothes was all that was needed for a miracle- and yet the Lord graciously worked with all these people and situations to bless them. On the other hand, embalming would've been done quickly, and perhaps the intensity of the tumult and weeping was because she had indeed just died, and the minstrels would have only just arrived. The Lord in this case would've arrived at the very peak of human distress and need. This is why He was 'delayed' on the way, in order for that peak of need to be reached. Mk. 5:38,39 emphasizes the extraordinary agitation.

5:39- see on Acts 21:13.

*And when he had entered, he said to them: Why make you a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeps-* The Lord dismissed the noise of the flute players as a mere "tumult". The Angel repeated the same words to the women at the Lord's grave, as did the Lord to Mary: "Why do you weep?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Surely those women were close to the Lord at this time. The Lord used the same word choice before and after His resurrection, showing the continuity of personality between how we are now in the flesh, and how we shall eternally be. Salvation is personal, and how we are now is of critical importance eternally.

*5:40 And they laughed him to scorn-* This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics. It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

*But he, having put them outside, took the father of the child and her mother and those that were with him, and went to where the child was-* The Lord was consciously seeking to reduce the element of hysteria at the miracle He knew He was going to do. Pentecostals need to note this. He wanted as few as possible to see the dead body actually revive. There was perhaps a similar logic in the way His own resurrection was not done publicly and His risen body was only seen by a relatively few rather than being displayed publicly. This was not His way, nor the Father's way, even during His ministry.

*5:41 And taking the child by the hand, he said to her: Talitha cumi, which means, little girl, I say to you, rise!-* The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

"Rise" here isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous.

*5:42 And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement-* We note the connection with the woman who had been sick for twelve years. God was at work in parallel in those lives over that period. Their being overcome with amazement reads rather negatively; amazement rather than faith and thanksgiving. The same word is used of the women's amazement at the news of the Lord's resurrection, having again been told not to weep (Mk. 16:8).

*5:43 And he strictly ordered them that no one should know about this-* The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*...He said...let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected to tell nobody what was done, even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

*And told them to give her something to eat-* We see here a window into His sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Despite the inevitable hysteria of joy experienced by the parents, He realized she was hungry, not having eaten for a long time.

# MARK CHAPTER 6

*6:1 And he left there and went to his own country; and his disciples followed him-* An artless reflection of the way in which He really was so human, having His "own" native area- here on this earth and not in any pre-existent form in Heaven! He had a very common Jewish name. The brothers of Jesus had names which were among the commonest Jewish names at the time- James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). I know we know this, but just remember how Jesus truly shared our nature. He smelt the smells of the marketplace, as He walked around helping a little child crying because he'd lost his mum. From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there truly came the words of Almighty God. There, in the very flesh and body tissue of the man Jesus, was God manifested in flesh. And yet that wondrous man, that being, that Son of God who had no human father, readily laughed at the funny side of events, just like anyone else. His hands and arms would have been those of a working man. He is always described as walking everywhere- and it's been calculated that He must have walked 10,000 km. during His ministry. He slept under the Olive trees at the foot of the Mount of Olives; the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head. So He would often have appeared a bit rough, His feet would have developed large blisters, and His skin would have been sunburnt. Palestine was infested with bandits at the time. It was almost inevitable that the Lord was robbed and threatened at least once. He would have gone through all the gut feelings one does when they are mugged: the initial shock, the obvious question that skates through the mind 'How much harm are they gonna do me...?', the bad taste left in the mouth afterwards, the way one keeps on re-living every moment of what happened. He would have known those feelings.

*6:2 And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying: Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom given to him? What mighty works are done by his hands!-* To my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-wordliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs.

Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was "hidden" as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being "at home" there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his "own city" (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don't forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn't exactly show herself for Him.

*6:3 Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended by him-* See on :2. It has been suggested that the title "son of Mary" given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father's name. ""Jesus, son of Mary" has a pejorative sense... [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother's name". The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother.

According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 "the last deception shall be worse than the first" is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

Their offence or stumbling is effectively what is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus

to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized. He was so human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land". The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasant who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession". A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower

class Palestinian piety". If this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it...He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

6:4 *And Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honour, save in his hometown-* We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris*("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different



sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on Mt. 13:58.

*And among his own kin, and in his own family-* We have yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity, in that He talked of His own family of origin, which included His blood brothers and sisters of the previous verses. But He has just spoken of Himself as the 'householder', the head of the family / house (see on Mt. 13:27,52). Clearly enough, He is contrasting His spiritual family with His natural family. That group of mixed up, doubting and misunderstanding men and women who followed Him- had replaced His family of origin as His real family.

6:5 *And there he could not do his mighty work, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them-* He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6). Although the Lord at times healed people who had no faith (e.g. the blind man who didn't even know who the Son of God was), yet it seems that the Lord in this context wanted to see faith before healing people. Thus we see His sensitivity in operating in a different way with different people. Sometimes He does things for people *in order that* they might come to faith; in other contexts, He will only do things for people if they first have faith. It would seem therefore that He expected faith from His family and neighbours, seeing that they knew Him. Mk. 6:6 adds the comment that the Lord was "amazed" at their unbelief- the only time we hear of Him being 'amazed'. Yet given His penetrating psychological insight into people, surely He could have guessed at the response in Nazareth? His amazement would therefore seem to be a reflection of His supreme *hopefulness* for people- a characteristic which makes the Lord so altogether lovely and such a powerful example to us.

6:6- see on Lk. 2:33.

*And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages teaching-* The Lord Himself *marvelled* at the unbelief of men, despite knowing what was in man. Surely He could only have genuinely felt such marvel because He began with such an essentially positive spirit. We notice that the focus of His ministry was upon the villages. He clearly didn't want to attract large crowds. His desire was to get His message over rather than deal with the material problems of humanity.

6:7 *And he called the twelve-* Mt. "called to him", implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:5). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him...". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

*And began to send them out in pairs-* The "pairs" may not just have been for mutual encouragement, but in allusion to the principle of two or three witnesses. For a witness was being made to Israel, to which they were to be held accountable.

*And he gave them authority over the unclean spirits-* This is in the context of the Lord's concern that the crowds were sheep with no shepherd, which I have suggested was an allusion to Moses' words of Num. 27:17 (see on Mt. 9:36). Moses asks for God to raise up another to do his work, and God gives him Joshua- and is told "You shall invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20). So the Lord is here treating the disciples as if they are His replacement, going out to do His work, just as the later body of Christ are to do. We have in this preaching tour they are sent on some sort of foretaste of the great commission.

6:8 *And he instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff. No bread, no wallet-* Mark is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats" (AV). All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter...

there abide till you depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

*No money in their purse-* Mt. "Nor brass for your purses"- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

6:9 *But to go wearing sandals, and not to wear two coats-* See on :8; an allusion to Israel on Passover night. Adam Clarke claims: "The sandal was originally a part of the woman's dress; ancient authors represent them as worn only by women". In this case the command to not wear shoes but sandals (Mt.) was significant. It was another part of the Lord's attempt to challenge gender stereotypes in the new community of people He was forming, where there was to be in that sense neither male nor female, slave nor free. And He may be directing their attention to Ps. 68:11 Heb. and LXX, where "great was the company *of the women* who published" the word of salvation.

At this point, Matthew records that they were commanded not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Mt. 10:5). Mark omits this because he was preaching to Gentiles. We cannot omit any part of the basic Gospel message; but we can present it in ways which are appropriate to our audience.

6:10 *And he said to them: Whenever you enter into a house as a guest, remain there until you leave town-* This appears to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on; see on :8. It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, the Lord implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

In practice, this command was in order to develop relationships in families which would lead to the development of house churches, which was the Lord's preferred vision for His church, at least in the first century.

6:11 *And whatever place shall not receive you and they will not hear you, as you leave there, shake off the dust that is under your feet for a testimony against them-* The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused

defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Indeed, John's immersion of repentant Israelites would have recalled the way that Gentiles had to be likewise dipped before being accepted into the synagogue. He was teaching "that all Israel were Gentiles in the eyes of God". Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations. The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). She would be "Condemned with the world...".

6:12 *And they went out and preached that all should repent-* Mt. 10:7 and Mk. 6:12 parallel preaching the soon coming of the Kingdom with preaching repentance. The very message of the Lord Jesus is of itself an appeal to re-think, to repent, to change.

6:13 *And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them-* Anointing with oil was a common way of trying to cure people. In the case of these healings, they were achieved by the power of God and not by the oil. And yet he did this in order to relate to people in their terms, to as it were speak their language; and that is also the reason why the language of demon possession is used. Anointing with oil also meant to be given a commission. Those healed were thereby commissioned to do something for the Lord, for the Messiah / anointed one with whom they were now associated. We noted on 1:31 how when Peter's wife's mother was cured she responded by immediately serving the Lord and His people.

6:14 *And king Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become well known-* When the disciples went out preaching around Israel, Herod heard of the fame of *Jesus*- because they so manifested Him.

*And he said: John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these powers work in him-* The Lord's relationship with His cousin John provides an exquisite insight into both His humanity and His humility. The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected. Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero-

and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

*And therefore do these powers work in him-* The Greek could more likely mean 'the powers', a reference to the popular beliefs in various 'powers' rather than one God. Jn. 10:41 is plain that "John did no miracle", and yet such was the evident spirituality of John that the theory quickly arose that the miracles of Jesus were really being done by John *redivivus*.

14:3 *For Herod had arrested John and bound him-* 'Laid hands on'. The Greek means just that, but it is possibly mistranslated in Jn. 20:23: "Whosoever sins you retain ['lay hands on'], they are retained". The idea is that we can in some cases obtain forgiveness for others' sins; but we must beware lest we lay hands on their sin and commit it ourselves. This is exactly the teaching of Jude- to reclaim others who are in sin, whilst being careful not to become contaminated by their sins rubbing off on us. Herod and his servants (Mt. 14:2) had laid hold on John, bound him, and cast him into prison. These are all terms used elsewhere about how the Lord Jesus will do exactly the same in condemning people at the last day. His servants (Mt. 22:13) shall lay hold of them (Rev. 20:2), bind them (Mt. 22:13) and cast them into prison (condemnation- Mt. 18:30). And these terms are also used about what happened to the Lord Jesus in His death: laid hold on by servants at a king's command (s.w. Mt. 26:4,48,50,57) bound (Jn. 18:12), to prison (Lk. 22:33). Herod is therefore being set up here as an anti-Christ, a fake Christ. And the Lord's death is again described in similar terms to that of John, whose ministry He continued. The way disciples came seeking the body is another point of connection. As events unfolded with the Lord's arrest and binding, He would've surely perceived the connection with John. And would've likewise seen how He was as it were going through the process of condemnation, being treated as a sinner, although He was not one. This means that He has even more so the right to condemn men, because in essence He knows the condemnation process. And it gives Him the ability to identify with those who in this life are currently under condemnation for their sins, and seek to lead them out of that position.

6:15 *But others said: It is Elijah; and others said: It is a prophet, even as one of the prophets-* As made explicit in Matthew 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another. By assuming the Lord was Elijah rather than Messiah, we see how they had missed the whole point of John's teaching; for he had been the Elijah prophet, heralding Messiah. And yet John had such popularity that Herod had been unable to murder him because of his mass support (Mt. 14:5). The image of John was popular, John as religion; but his essential message went unheeded. And so it can be with us today; the image and religion of Christianity may be appealing to us to the point we identify with it. But the essential message of the Christ who should be at the core of it can be totally ignored or not even grasped. See on :20.

6:16 *But Herod, when he heard of it, said: It is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen-* Having killed John, Herod's conscience was haunted by him, and he was eager to see John alive again. He regretted murdering him; his subconscious desire was that John would somehow overcome that death and revive. And so he became convinced of the idea that John had reincarnated as Jesus. This explains why people can be so utterly convinced of after death experiences, reincarnation, ghosts, appearances of the dead etc. Such apparent experiences are a reflection of their own deep subconscious desire to see the dead again, to make death somehow not death. This is where the clear Biblical definition of death as unconsciousness is so challenging.

6:17 *For Herod himself had had John arrested and thrown into prison to please Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her-* Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on Mt. 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus.

6:18 *For John said to Herod: It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife-* The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's

law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

6:19 *And Herodias set herself against him, and desired to kill him; but she could not-* Mt. 14:5 says that Herod also wanted to kill John, but feared the people. The same Greek words are used about Herod wanting to kill Jesus in Lk. 13:31. A manipulative woman arranging the death of a prophet through a weak willed ruler recalls Jezebel in 1 Kings 21; and she was a protagonist of Elijah, upon whom John the Baptist was clearly modelled.

6:20 *For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was much perplexed; and he heard him gladly-* This came about after his initial desire to murder John (Mt. 14:5). There was something in John's message which made him oscillate between respecting him and wanting to murder him. He heard him gladly, just as the crowds of self-righteous Jerusalem Jews streamed out of Jerusalem to hear John's rough message of repentance. We too can intellectually assent to a message without grasping the personal appeal for actual change and repentance. See on :15.

6:21 *But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles, military commanders and the leading men of Galilee-* The idea of "opportunity" leads us to think that the whole scene was set up, so that when Herod was drunk and made one of his famous 'I'll give you whatever you like!' statements, they could then pounce with their request.

6:22 *And when the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests, and so the king said to the girl: Ask of me whatever you will, and I will give it to you-* As suggested on :21, Herod when drunk probably often said these kind of things; for this would not have been his first wild birthday party.

6:23 *And he made an oath to her: Whatever you shall ask of me, I will give it to you, to the half of my kingdom-* This continues a theme we find in the book of Daniel- powerful rulers making a rash oath and feeling forced to carry it out because of shame and the pressure of courtiers. The contrast with God, the ultimate ruler, is not that He is not so rash and not manipulated by His subjects. Rather the contrast is surely that

Yahweh *does* change, He has no fear of shame or being shamed; such is His grace that when He sees a repentant Nineveh, He *does* change His original intention. The fear of shame and pressure from the eyes of others is what leads so many leaders into behaviour and positions which are against their better judgment. There is no shame in change. Indeed, change is part of real spirituality. "To the half my kingdom" is alluding to the king's promise to Esther in Esther 5:23, but it seems an allusion with no context or specific meaning, for Herodias' daughter was not at all Esther.

*6:24 And she went out and said to her mother: What shall I ask? And she said: The head of John the Baptist-* I suggested on :21 that the whole thing was a set up. They knew Herod made exaggerated offers when drunk, and so they waited for that moment and then pounced with the request for John's head as the next dinner dish. Her going to her mother was therefore just part of the act, rather than from genuine lack of awareness as to what to ask for.

*6:25 And she rushed to the king and asked, saying: Here and now-* The emphasis on "here" is strange. She wanted the head brought in before everyone. This rather strongly contradicts Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, a long way from Herod's court.

*I want you to give me on a platter the head of John the Baptist-* The feast would have been full of plates with various dishes. The idea was that the head would be offered for eating. The implication is that the head would've been brought immediately, which suggests that John was imprisoned nearby. This again rules out Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, far from Herod's palace in Tiberias. The offering of a head on a platter is full of allusion to pagan ritual. Herod, as one who claimed to be an observant Jew, was now forced to choose- between being a serious Jew, following Divine principle, or a pagan. He was forced to decide- and chose wrongly. He had earlier wanted to kill John, and now his evil thought was being brought to action, in a powerful outworking of the Lord's principle that the thought is indeed counted as the action. We ask, naturally, why it all had to be as it was. John would've carefully reflected upon the life of Elijah, and John would've seen the parallel between Jezebel and the manipulative women behind his own death- and taken comfort from that in his last moments: that he was in fact the Elijah prophet.

*6:26 And the king was exceeding sorry; but for the sake of his oaths and his dinner guests, he could not reject her request-* And yet we learn in Mt. 14:5 that Herod had wanted to kill John because John had criticized Herod's lifestyle. We may feel flushes of anger against a person, but if it



were to come to actually carrying out what we imagine- we would likely regret it.

A *horkos* ["oath"] was not merely a verbal promise; although he was not ethnically Jewish, Herod claimed to be a practicing Jew, and an 'oath' would've been something like 'May I be eternally condemned at the last day if I do not...'. Peter used the same oaths in denying the Lord. And so we see the torture of this unhappy man- asking himself to be condemned if he didn't do something which surely warrants eternal condemnation. The only way out was to *change*, to re-pent, to re-think; to recognize that he was not going to get out of this without a deep repentance.

*6:27 And immediately the king sent a soldier of his guard and commanded that he bring John's head. And the soldier went to the prison and beheaded John-* The implication is that the court party was held close to the prison. This would have been most unlikely if Josephus is correct in claiming that John was imprisoned and beheaded in the fortress of Machaerus. Herod's court was in Tiberias. The implication of the language is that Herod took full responsibility for this- as if he personally beheaded John. And he realized this later in his conscience: "John whom I beheaded... John have I beheaded" (Mk. 6:16; Lk. 9:9).

*6:28 And brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother-* The language of bringing to and giving on further is found in the following account of the miraculous feeding. The Lord uses the word "brought" of how He wished the loaves and fishes to be "brought" to Him for His Messianic banquet (Mt. 14:18). It may be that Herod's banquet is being set up in contrast to that of the Lord Jesus described later in the chapter.

*6:29 And when his disciples heard of it, they went and took his corpse and laid it in a tomb-* The phrase is only used elsewhere about Joseph taking up the body of the Lord Jesus after His death (Jn. 19:31,38). And doing the same with it- burying it. He was likely one of the followers of John the Baptist, and his fine action here was surely motivated by the memory of those brave brethren who 'took up the body' of John. The example of devotion shown by believers can inspire later believers in different contexts. The power of example is far greater than we can ever imagine.

*6:30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught-* The same Greek words are found in Jn. 20:18 of Mary going and telling the disciples. Here, after the 'taking up of the body' of the Lord Jesus and 'burying' it, just as had been done to John's corpse, Mary "went and told" the disciples. The disciples "went and told Jesus" of John's

death; now, Mary goes to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. The similarity of language and yet the inversion of the ideas is all surely intentional. The intention is to show that the tragedy of John's death was vindicated and gloriously reversed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

*6:31 And he said to them: Come, we shall depart for a deserted place and rest for a while. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure time, even to eat-* Lk. 9:10 says that it was near to Bethsaida. This indicates the literal accuracy of the Gospels, because Bethsaida was just outside the boundary of Herod's jurisdiction, and it would be understandable that after his execution of John, the disciples and Jesus might want to be outside of his territory.

Matthew says that this desire to withdraw for a while was immediately upon hearing of John's death. The feeding of the five thousand is not in chronological sequence; it is part of the flashback to John's death. Perhaps the intention is to present the Lord's banquet as the antithesis of Herod's banquet which led to John's execution. We see here yet another insight into the Lord's humanity. Knowledge of John's death wasn't beamed into the Lord's mind; He didn't have the total omniscience of God. For He was not God Himself, but the human Son of God. He had to be informed of some things before He knew them. And He reacts in a very human way- He wants to go away on His own with His closest friends to reflect upon the death of a relative and co-worker. But again, in a typically human way, His plan to have time out relatively alone was thwarted- despite His intention to get away alone, or at least just with His close friends, the crowds heard He had been spotted heading out to an uninhabited area, and followed Him there by foot.

*6:32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place-* Bethsaida, according to Lk. 9:10. See on :31. "The boat" suggests they were a common sight, travelling in the same boat, which presumably belonged to the family of James and John, whose father Zebedee had a large enough business to employ hired hands.

*6:33 Now many saw them going and recognised them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them-* This is added to demonstrate their commitment to hearing Him teach. Why were they so keen to make such effort to get to Him? Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people- healing and feeding them (see

on Mt. 14:22). But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

The Lord in Jn. 6 comments upon their efforts. The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own. The people had walked all round the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. In typical style, He responded: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (Jn. 6:27). They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking round the lake. We like those crowds want to concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

6:34 *And when Jesus came ashore, he saw a great crowd-* Or, 'came forth', as Mt. We could picture Him hiding away in some cave or bush,

noticing the crowds combing the area, having spotted the abandoned boat. And then battling with a desire to retreat further into the bush away from them, or to send them away- but instead having compassion on them and going out to meet them with teaching and healing. But that is unlikely the right reading, because :33 notes that some of the people who ran around the lake got to the destination before they did. The 'coming forth' would therefore have been coming forth from the boat to land. That moment is perhaps noted because the obvious inclination would have been to sail further and find a better resting place, far from this irritating crowd.

*And he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things-* His pity was therefore for their spiritual state rather than their material need. This being 'moved with compassion' is a major characteristic of the Lord which the Gospel writers noticed (s.w. Mt. 9:36; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34 in Matthew alone- see too Lk. 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The Greek speaks of a literal movement within the ribcage, as if the Lord's actual body was moved by the compassion He felt. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and at the day of judgment- and forever. This same basic pity is part of Him, as it is of His Father- and it must be with us too. Several times when we read of the Lord showing such pity, it is in the context of others *not* doing so. In this instance, the disciples don't want to feed the hungry people; and likewise in Mt. 15:32. In Mt. 18:27 the compassion of the Lord to His indebted servant was not reciprocated by that servant; the Samaritan of the parable had compassion when the priest and Levite did not (Lk. 10:33); the Father had compassion on the prodigal son when the older brother did not (Lk. 15:20). Such compassion is therefore an act of the will, rather than a streak some are born with. We can shut up our "bowels of compassion" against human need (1 Jn. 3:17), we have to "put on... bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12).

6:35 *And when the day was far spent, his disciples came to him-* The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

*And said: The place is deserted and the day is now far spent-* AV "The time is now past". "Past" translates *parerchomai*; the Lord uses a similar word in replying that "they need not *depart*"- *aperchomai*. This word choice not only aided memorization of the Gospel record. The disciples considered that time had more than gone, that it was inevitable that the Lord must now send the crowd away, and should've done earlier. But He is saying that actually He is not limited by time, the time didn't have to be "past"; because He was not limited by food either, and could feed them.

6:36 *Send them away-* Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50). They ask the Lord to send the multitude away, whereas He had taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

*That they may go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat-* Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which they themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

6:37 *But he answered and said to them: You give them something to eat. And they said to him: Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?*

- The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them. He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. We too are

given Divine nudges towards seeing Biblical precedents for our situations; but we may not always grasp them. Familiarity with the Bible text through regular re-reading is a great help here. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?". They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

If a labourer worked for a denarius a day during harvest season, we can conclude that their figure of 200 denarii was a year's wages for a working man. Like us so often, they focused on the size of the problem rather than on the Lord's ability to move absolutely any mountain.

According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them...", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

*6:38 And he said to them: How many loaves have you? Go and see. And when they knew, they reported: Five loaves and two fishes-* He calmly bid them feed a huge crowd with just a few loaves. We are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking

about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.). We sense something of the Lord's same style to this day as He works in our lives. They were asked to number their loaves, but they perhaps sarcastically add: "And two [small] fishes".

Mt. 14:17 adds the word "only": "We have here only five loaves and two fishes". Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7 AV). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:39 *And he commanded that all should sit down in groups upon the green grass-* "In groups" is a technical term for how in the Roman empire, large groups sat at groups of three tables forming three sides of a square, with divans or couches on which they reclined as they ate. The open end of the square was entered by the servants who waited on the guests. But there no tables nor couches. They were bidden imagine them. For this was set up as a banquet; with the Lord as host. It was a foretaste of the Messianic banquet. And all and any present were invited to recline and eat. So the people sat down as it were in table-companies but without tables, in companies of a hundred and others of fifty, waited upon by the disciples. Who you ate with had religious meaning in their society; it was a sign of religious fellowship. And here the Lord opened His table to any who wished to hear His word, be they clean, unclean, Jew, Gentile, women or children.

6:40 *And they sat down in groups of hundreds or of fifties-* Vine comments: "Lit., like beds in a garden. The former adverb, by companies, describes the arrangement; this the colour. The red, blue, and yellow clothing of the poorest Orientals makes an Eastern crowd full of colour; a fact which would appeal to Peter's eye, suggesting the appearance of flower-beds in a garden". If this were the case, then the allusion would be to the encampment of Israel in Num. 24:6: "As valleys they are spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted, as cedar trees beside the waters". Equally if the allusion is instead to military groups or companies, the idea is that this apparently random group of peasants, with all their shady biographies and legal uncleanness and lack of understanding, were the new Israel the Lord was forming; the new "hosts" of Yahweh of Hosts.

6:41 *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven-* This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1. And the Comforter passages promise us that we can share His relationship with the Father, through the gift of the Spirit.

*He blessed and broke the loaves; and he gave them to the disciples to set before them; and the two fish he divided among them all-* The aorist followed by the imperfect in "broke and gave" suggests He broke the bread once, and went on giving it out as a continuous act. This speaks of the Lord's one time death, and His continuous giving out of that to His people. The miracle of multiplication therefore happened at the moment of breaking the bread and His giving it out. This is indeed the work of the Spirit in our lives.



Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

6:42 *And they all ate and were filled-* "All" ate; and eating together at a banquet was a sign of religious fellowship. There were for sure some there who were Gentiles, unclean, or simply curious. They were "filled", perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full". The blessings of an obedient Israel were counted to this random crowd. By grace. They were "filled" superabundantly. The Lord's generosity is wonderful.

6:43 *And they collected twelve basketfuls of leftovers, and also of the fish-* Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("leftovers") that it filled twelve baskets, another implication that here were assembled the new Israel. The word for "baskets" here is a different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas. The Lord imparted a sense of ritual holiness to the otherwise random and unclean.

Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the

background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

6:44 *There were five thousand men that ate the loaves*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded later. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

6:45 *And immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and to go without him to the other side to Bethsaida*- Jn. 6:15 says that the crowds wanted to "take him by force to make Him a king". Yet these were the same folk, it seems, who had showed little real faith in Him previously- see on Mt. 14:13 *on foot*. They were so fickle. They evidently saw the connection between the feeding miracle and Him being Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was that He was to be a King offering immediate salvation. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:9 claimed that "...as the former redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend". We get the impression that the Lord felt under a sense of great urgency- He "constrained" the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whilst He sent the crowd away. Perhaps He felt that the crowd intended to make Him King and the disciples the leaders of their new *junta*, but by sending the disciples away, He was greatly reducing the chances of them doing this. However the other reason was simply that

the disciples themselves were looking for an immediate kingdom and glory, and He knew the temptation would be too great for them. He likewise works with us so often to deliver us from temptation He knows is too great for us.

The Lord told them to sail to the other side of the lake, but said that they would be 'going before / ahead of Him'. The Greek could suggest that His words could have been understood as meaning that they would sail to that place, He would send the crowds away, and then go behind them- i.e., walking on the water. Of course, they could have understood 'going before Him' as meaning that He would join them there at a later stage. But as they sailed away, they must have debated whatever He meant. Because if He meant that He would join them there at a later stage, however was He going to walk there around the lake, whilst so desperately wanting the crowds to go away from Him? Remember He had no personal boat, and they were in a deserted location. Whichever exit He took, whichever way He walked around the lake, He would have the very people with Him whom He was so earnestly trying to avoid. Again, as in asking *them* to *give* and not *buy* food for the crowd, the Lord was stretching them. He wanted them to reflect upon His words, and if they had done, then logically they were intended to come to the conclusion that He was implying that He would walk over the water to them. And if they were Old Testament minded, they would have known the passages which spoke of Yahweh walking upon the water and the waves of the sea (Ps. 29:3,10; 77:19; Nah. 1:3; Hab. 3:15). When, therefore, the waves arose and they seemed likely to drown, they were intended to figure that He would come to them, manifesting Yahweh, walking upon the waves of the sea- to save them. Whether any of them did actually get that far in perception and faith seems doubtful. But I believe we can discern how the Lord was seeking to lead them and educate their faith. The tragedy is that so many of His detailed plans for us are likewise wasted because of our lack of spiritual perception, and allowing the immediacy of issues to obscure the clear light of His leadership through life.

However, Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

*While he sent the crowd away-* The phrase is repeated twice in Mt. 14:22,23, probably in recognition of the miracle performed in managing to send these crowds away empty handed, with no visible Messianic Kingdom. At least, the power of personality in the Lord was very great to be able to get Himself out of this situation.

6:46 *And after he had taken leave of them, he departed into the mountain to pray-* Mt. "by himself". The term *kata idios* ["by himself"] is

used about 16 times in the Gospels, covering around 12 different occasions. The need to be alone with the Lord or with the Father is therefore a significant theme. The Lord had departed to the deserted place because of this need to be *kata idios* (Mt. 14:13), but His plans were thwarted by the unexpected tenacity of the crowd in following Him there. In this we see another picture of His humanity. But ultimately, God granted Him the need He felt to be *kata idios*, to be alone with God. Perhaps one reason He so insistently sent both the crowd and the disciples away was because He knew He simply had to be alone with God. And there can be times like this for us too. No matter how stupid we might appear in secular life, there can be a time when you just have to go and sit in the toilet for five minutes in your lunch break and pray. The Lord uses the term in speaking of how we are each given something very personal which we are to use in His service- *kata idios*, 'alone by ourselves', or as in AV "according to his several ability" (Mt. 25:15). Each sheep is called by the Lord *kata idios*, AV "by name" (Jn. 10:3). And therefore the judgment of each believer will be *kata idios*, AV "according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). There is a very wide range of translations of this phrase. But the idea is that we were each individually called by the Lord and given different callings, and our judgment will be according to this. This is not to say that there is anything other than one basic faith, Gospel, Hope, Lord etc. But in many denominations and fellowships the idea is pushed that each believer must adopt an identical, detailed statement of understanding and calling. Yet in practice, the frames of our calling and the Lord's hopes for our responses vary significantly between individuals.

The fact the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father is one of the profoundest and logically strongest evidences that He was not God in any Trinitarian sense. The basic facts of the Gospel records were simply not given their full weight by the unBiblical politicians who first created the Trinity doctrine. The liberal theologian Hal Taussig observes that other theologians haven't written much about Jesus at prayer- for this very reason, that of itself it contradicts Trinitarian dogma: "Because Jesus at prayer confuses theological categories of "divine" and "human" (is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?), theologians have rarely been interested in Jesus at prayer" (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 7). Taussig's question "is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?" is ultimately impossible for Trinitarian apologists to answer.

6:47 *And when evening had come, the boat was in the midst of the sea-* People at that time had a strong association between the sea and the forces of evil and condemnation; beginning with the condemnation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Bible itself speaks of condemnation as being swamped at sea by the waves. The Egyptians perished "in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:23,27; Ez. 29:3); Jonah drowned "in the midst of the

sea" (Jonah 2:3) as does the fool of Proverbs (Prov. 23:34), as did Tyre and the Gentile nations (Ez. 26:12; 27:26,27,32; 28:8; Ps. 46:2) and Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The disciples doubtless felt condemned. For there were these 12 Old Testament references to condemnation ringing in their Jewish ears. Their cry for salvation was therefore not merely for physical deliverance, but a cry for deliverance out of condemnation. They were "tossed with waves"- the very term used for the torment of the rejected (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). The disciples had earlier seen people who were tormented [s.w. "tossed"] being delivered by the Lord- to pave the way for them personally crying out for that same deliverance (s.w. Mt. 8:6).

*And he was alone on the land-* This is a pointed repetition of the information that the Lord was there *kata idios*- alone apart, by Himself. His aloneness with God is being brought to our attention. Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray... He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough*. Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

6:48 *And seeing they were having difficulty rowing, for the wind was against them, about the fourth watch of the night he went to them, walking on the sea; and he would have passed by them-* The Greek strictly means that He departed, He left to walk over the sea to them, in the fourth watch of the night (Mt.). Mark adds the detail that "He would have passed by them". This is often His style to this day- it's not that He plays hard to get, but He wants to elicit in us a sense of our desperation for Him. Likewise He often asked sick people what He could do for them, when it was obvious what they wanted. For the same reason on the road

to Emmaus, He made as if He would have gone further- to elicit in those disciples an urgent desire for fellowship with Him. The same word translated "passed by them" had just been used by the disciples in saying that "the time is now *past*" and so the Lord should send the crowd away to feed themselves. The disciples likely realized that they were being corrected for their desire to turn away the crowds of people from the Lord; admittedly their motivation was poor, as the Lord seems to explain to them in John 6, but it was seriously wrong to turn them away. Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

Mark's account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason to think that Mark is really Peter's gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter's bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it.

Walking on the sea, Jesus "would have passed by them". I don't suppose He *would* have done, because He was 'coming unto them', but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written, from a human perspective. The same is the case with the language of demons.

6:49 *But they, when they saw him walking on the sea, supposed that it was a ghost and cried out-* The Greek *phantasma* could refer to a ghost, in which cases we see how under pressure, disciples return quickly to their previous belief systems. But the word could equally refer to an Angel. Their fear, and that fear being met with assurance *not* to fear, would then be typical of human reaction whenever Angels appear to them. The Lord's assurance that "It is *I*" would then be yet another evidence that the Lord Jesus was not an Angel (as the Watchtower wrongly claim).

6:50 *For they all saw him and were disturbed-* The word is specifically used in literature of troubled water (and in Jn. 5:4,7). The state of the water was as the state of their minds. Hence the power of the image of the Lord Jesus walking at ease upon that troubled water.

*But he immediately spoke to them and said to them: Be of good courage! It is I! Be not afraid-* They had at least twice heard the Lord comfort others with those words "be of good courage" before healing them (Mt. 9:2,22). According to their recollection of His words, so their comfort would have been. And that principle applies to us today. "Be not afraid" was a phrase so often on the Lord's lips to the disciples. They so often

feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). Despite His high demands on the one hand, on the other, He was and is ever assuring His people of His total and saving love for them. Peter uses the same phrase when he in his turn urges us to not be afraid nor 'troubled'- the very word used about the troubled disciples on the water that night (1 Pet. 3:14; Mt. 14:26). The Lord likewise leads each of us through situations in order that we might then strengthen others in those situations. Paul's teaching in 2 Cor. 1:4-8 would seem to go as far as saying that in fact *all* we experience is in order that we might later give strength to others in similar situations. And this enables us, in broad terms at least, to attach meaning to event in a way which the unbeliever simply cannot.

The Qumran *Thanksgiving Hymns* are full of reference to the true Israel being saved from drowning in the sea of Gentile nations (1 QH 3:6,12-18; 6:22-25; 7:4,5). The *Testament of Naphtali* 6:1-10 speaks of "the ship of Jacob" almost sinking in a storm, but Jacob himself walks on the water to save her. Clearly the Lord has these popular images in mind, and is recasting them- Jesus is the founder of the new Israel as Jacob was of the old, his 12 disciples are as the 12 sons of Jacob. And the faithful Israel in the boat are in fact not very faithful, they are secular, non-religious very human Jews who have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

"It is I" is *ego eimi* and could be understood as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. They were to understand Him as the fulfilment of the Old Testament language of Yahweh walking upon the raging sea. "It is I" could be a quotation of the Divine Name from Is. 41:4; 43:10. It is used in that context of not fearing the power of Assyria / Babylon. The Lord wanted the disciples to perceive that the huge waves were to be met with the same faith that the faithful remnant had in the face of the opposition of superpowers against Israel. However, it needs to be asked how else the Lord could have said "It's Me!". There are alternatives, but this is the phrase used. And yet on the other hand, the use of *ego eimi* is not necessarily an allusion to the Divine Name, because it is found on the lips of men in 2 Sam. 2:19 LXX; Mt. 26:22,25; Jn. 1:20,27; 9:8 and Acts 22:3 (see too Lk. 1:18,19). The question is: Did the Lord really expect the disciples to perceive such Scriptural allusions in the midst of panic and crisis? And if so, what was the point? For surely they were not in the midst of a quiet Bible class evening. The point likely was and is that in the heat of crisis, the spiritually minded will unconsciously perceive spiritual nudges from the Father and Son- and thus be strengthened to endure and decide rightly in the heat of crisis.

6:51 *And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly amazed-* Gk. 'grew weary', as if there was a brief period over which the raging decreased.

6:52 *Because they did not understand the miracle of the loaves; their heart was hardened-* And yet Matthew says that they worshipped Him as "Son of God". Perhaps they did this after their initial amazement. Or it could be that we can make such statements of belief whilst still having hardened hearts and amazed in our actual unbelief.

6:53 *And when they had crossed over-* Perhaps the emphasis is upon they. The Lord and His disciples were now united again.

*They landed at Gennesaret and anchored there-* This is on the northwest shore of Galilee. Mk. 6:45 says that they departed on their journey aiming for Bethsaida, on the northeast shore. The Lord had upbraided Bethsaida in Mt. 11:21. Perhaps the disciples had insisted on pressing ahead with giving those people another chance, whereas that was not the Lord's will. Such providential overruling of our preaching is a common occurrence. One wonders whether the changed journey plan involved not returning to the Jews but going to a more Gentile area. This would have been in line with the Lord's own change of course in His ministry, turning away from the Jewish masses towards the tiny minority who accepted Him and towards the Gentiles (see on Mt. 13:10).

6:54 *And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognised him-* The Lord was a well known figure. But He used an economy of miracle, focusing upon the instruction of the twelve and those who wished to learn from Him. We get the impression He avoided crowds wherever possible; the crowd scenes are nearly always against His will. So whenever He was seen in public, the crowds came.

6:55 *And ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard he was-* As noted on :54, "wherever He was" suggests that He sought to avoid gathering crowds to Himself. But those who made the effort to come to Him were not disappointed (:56).

6:56 *And wherever he went, into villages, or into cities, or into the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces-* See on Mt. 9:21. His preaching campaign is spoken of as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society.

*And pleaded with him-* The Greek *parakleo* means literally 'to call near' and in this case we can understand it literally. They felt that they had to touch Him in order to be healed (unlike the cases of faith in His spoken word which the Lord so commends). Therefore, needing that physical



presence, it makes sense to understand *parakleo* here as meaning to literally call near. They called Him near so that they might touch the hem of His garment.

*That they be allowed to touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched him were cured-* The Law of Moses commanded the Jews to make "borders" of blue upon their clothes (Num. 15:38), presumably to remind them of Heaven in daily life. But the same Hebrew word is found in Mal. 4:2, speaking of how the Messianic "sun of righteousness" was to arise with "healing in His hems". Their seeking for healing in the hem of the Lord's clothes was therefore a sign that they accepted Him as Messiah. But the 'arising' of Malachi 4 is the time of the Kingdom established on earth, with Judah freed from her oppressors. The time for Mal. 4:2 was not then. They thought it was. And yet the Lord still goes along with their misunderstanding, by granting them healing from His hems. This may have been simply from compassion of the moment towards human need; or it could be that the Lord was happy to reward faith when He saw it, even if it was based upon somewhat wrong interpretation of the Father's word.

# MARK CHAPTER 7

*7:1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus-* They came all the way to Galilee to try to trap the Lord in His words. And yet it was some of the Jerusalem priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees (Acts 15:5) who later accepted Christ. We would likely have ignored these troublemakers and given up on them as hard cases, to be endured but not converted. But the Lord's hope and vision for humanity was so wide- and in the end, even after His death, it paid off. This is a great challenge to us in our witness to all men, including the bitter, self-righteous religious leader types.

*7:2 And they saw that some of his disciples ate with unclean hands, that is, unwashed-* The Lord Jesus had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He'd asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord's passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

*7:3 The Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they first wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders-* This was well known to Jews in Palestine, and so Mark's addition of this background information suggests he was preaching to Gentiles.

*7:4 And when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they first purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze-* "Washing" is *baptizo*. The Jews practiced immersion multiple times in order to cleanse themselves, as they imagined, from the defilement caused by association with unclean persons. The Christian take on baptism is so different- it is to cleanse us from our own sins, not those of others which we have been associated with by physical contact. The Christian baptism was into death, into a grave, into association with a dead body- all of which made a Jew unclean and requiring immersion to cleanse them from.

*7:5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him: Why don't your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders-* The word *presbeteros* would've been understood by all to refer to members of the Sanhedrin. And yet the later New Testament uses the word about elders within the Christian church, who got to that status regardless of social position but purely on the basis of spiritual qualification; thus a spiritually qualified slave or young believer in their 20s could be

a *presbeteros* in the new Israel which was being consciously created by the Lord in parody of the old Israel.

Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). We too are to translate the Gospels into our own life situations.

*But eat their bread with unclean hands?*- Rabbi Joses claimed that "to eat with unwashed hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration.

*7:6 And he said to them: Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honour me with their lips but their heart is far from me-* See on Heb. 11:4. They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27).

Isaiah prophesied "of you" in the first century. The reference to "this people..." was not to be understood as only Isaiah's hearers, but all who read this living word. And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you in your generation*.

The prophecy quoted from Is. 29 is a criticism of the common people of Judah at Hezekiah's time; there was Godly leadership, but Isaiah laments that the ordinary people were far from Yahweh. But the Lord quotes this as relevant to the Jewish religious leadership, who prided themselves on their separation from the mass 'people of the land' whom they considered as apostate. Yet again we see His radical turning upside down of the Jewish worldview and creation of a new order, where secular people like His disciples were to be the new Sanhedrin leadership (see on Mt. 15:2 *elders*). Note that He was at this stage specifically addressing the Jewish elders, because only in Mt. 15:10 does He call the crowd to Him to listen.

*7:7 But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men-* The mere act of worship itself is not spirituality. Religion is full or 'worship' of God but this is not of itself acceptable to Him; so much such religion is "in vain". It depends whether our worship is a reflection of our understanding the right teachings / doctrines; otherwise it is worship in vain. Worship is therefore a reflection of and outflow from the things we believe about the Lord we worship.

Worship and sacrifice to God can be done "in vain" if our attitude to His word is wrong. The reason for the vanity of their worship and devotions was because their doctrine was wrong. This clearly shows that religious devotion alone doesn't mean anything in terms of acceptability with God. And it also shows that the intention of doctrine, of teaching from God's word, is so that our lives are *not* lived "in vain"; there is "effect" in the outworking of God's true word in human lives. "In vain" here is surely to be semantically paralleled with "making void" in :13.

The original of Is. 29:13,14 doesn't say "teaching for doctrines". It is addressed to *the people*, stating that their fear of God is taught by the doctrines of men. The Lord amends the text slightly to make it relevant to the *teachers* whom He was addressing. Such amending of Old Testament quotation was common in Jewish *midrash*. The point is, that God's ancient word is to be reapplied to us today in *our* contexts, rather than be left as mere historical statement to people long ago.

7:8 *You leave the commandment of God and cling to the tradition of men-* The contrasts are between 'leaving' and 'clinging'; between "commandment" and "tradition"; and finally, between "of God" and "of men". "Leaving" is literally 'to put away' and is used of divorce. The marriage contract between God and Israel was the Mosaic law. But they were putting that away, and thereby effectively divorcing God; His action in divorcing Israel was therefore only confirming them in what they themselves wished to do. "Cling" or 'cleave to' is likewise a marriage allusion; they had applied 'leave [Father] and cleave to [wife]' to their relationship with God. They had left Him and cleaved to men, with human tradition as their marriage contract with them. This is how serious it is to become enslaved to following tradition. God "commands", from God to man, whereas "tradition" is that which is passed on from men to man. The acceptance of tradition is therefore effectively a playing God.

7:9 *And he said to them: You are good at rejecting the commandment of God so that you can establish your tradition!*- They had rejected or [Gk.] brought to nothing, neutralized, the commandment of God. They had ended the law. What God did in ending the Mosaic law was only a confirmation of what Israel themselves had done. And they did it despite all their much vaunted attention to every letter of the words which comprised that law. They wished to effectively write their own law; they annulled God's commandment in order to establish their own tradition. "Establish" is a variant reading, but it fits well with the following verses which speak of their voiding of God's law in order to obey the tradition which they created (:13).

The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have

this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God's *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God's inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, 'getting around' the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

The tradition in view is not specifically their teaching about washing. The subsequent context shows the Lord has in view other traditions. His argument is therefore 'If *some* of your traditions are wrong and unBiblical, then why demand we keep other traditions which are within that same body of tradition'. And so He relentlessly requires that tradition within any religious group is fearlessly analysed- if some are unBiblical, then the others need not be respected. Just as "tradition" and "commandment" are placed in apposition to each other, likewise "your" is in opposition to "of God". Elevating tradition to the status of Divine commandment is yet another way in which religious people 'play God'.

7:10 *For Moses said-* "Commanded". God's word speaks directly to us, whereas the Greek word for "tradition" means something passed down. To make the point, the Lord speaks of the commandments of Moses as *God* commanding. The Jews spoke of *Moses* commanding (Jn. 8:5), and although the Lord also does (Mt. 8:4), His point is that it was effectively *God* commanding.

*Honour your father and your mother, and, He that speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death-* Thus the Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the commandment*" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them.

7:11 *But you say-* The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by the saying of men. This quotation was from the passed down traditions of the Jews. But the Lord says that *you* say this. The 'saying' of the Rabbis became the 'saying' of those who obeyed them. Thus obedience to a command (in this case, of men) is counted as 'saying' it- for we pass on teaching by our example of doing it. The depth of the Lord's analysis of their behaviour is amazing.

*If a man tells-* Matthew's word means to give a word, or written contract.

*His father or his mother: Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban (that is to say, an offering to God)- "Gained" or 'profit' is a term which reduces love and the care that comes from love to a mere transaction. The Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other). See on Mk. 3:4.*

If a gift was made to the temple treasury of what was reckoned to be the obligation of the man to his parents, or if the man agreed to list the temple treasury as a beneficiary in his will, giving to them the amount he would have spent caring for his elderly parents- then he was considered free from having to honour and care for them. The reasoning was that something promised to God in the future was His and could not therefore be spent on parents. But this was *not* honouring the parents (:6). We can't buy our way out of spiritual responsibility by making donations or making legacies which cost us nothing today. We can think that we are devoting ourselves to the Lord's cause over and above that which is required of us- when actually, we do nothing of the sort. We can give to the Lord's cause, when actually we have only got round the essential intention of God's commandments to be generous-spirited and show a true love (Mt. 15:5,6). The Jews fasted on days which the Law did not require of them; but in God's ultimate analysis, they did this for themselves, to bolster their own spiritual ego, rather than as a fast which He recognized (Zech. 7:15,16). The more active we are in the community of believers, the more we feel we go the extra miles- the more sober is this warning.

7:12 *You no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother- thus- "Not do anything" is "not honour..." in Matthew. To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6). This is the power of sin of omission.*

7:13 *Making void the word of God by your tradition which you have delivered; and you do many similar things-* see on Mt. 13:39. It could mean, literally, of no authority. Again the Lord is making the point that practical obedience to God's word is a function of what authority we give it. To disobey God's commands by seeking to 'get around' them is effectively saying that God's word is of no authority. And this is the context of this whole discussion- God's word is the sole authority, and not human tradition and the concessions to disobedience made by men. His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make "the word of God of none effect" by our traditions or our

lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men.

Or we can understand "effect" as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an "effect". God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has "effect"; disobedience therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting "honour" into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to teach us something. In Matthew we read of the "commandment" (*entole*) of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the "word" (*logos*) of God. What did the Lord say? Perhaps: 'You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect'. God's word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

7:14 *And again he called to him the crowd, and said to them: Hear me all of you, and understand-* His previous teaching in this chapter was therefore given to the "scribes and Pharisees" in a private audience, so Matthew implies. The Lord was speaking specifically to the crowd, without the presence of the disciples, who only later came to Him (:12). The Greek words for "hear and understand" were repeatedly used by the Lord in Mt. 13:13,14,15,19. There He had explained to the disciples that the crowds did *not* and *could not* "hear and understand", and therefore He was confusing them by parables; only the disciples heard and understood. But here, hoping against hope, the Lord makes a desperate appeal to the crowds to hear and understand. Such is His hopefulness that He was unashamed to depart from a declared position about people, and hope that they might somehow respond. We are left to imagine the tone of desperate pleading in His voice as He appealed for them to "hear and understand" in the light of how He had used those words about the crowds in Mt. 13. In the same spirit, Paul turned to the Gentiles- and yet continued by all means trying to persuade the Jews.

7:15 *There is nothing from outside the man that going into him can defile him-* Nothing which enters in can defile (Mt.). The same words are found in the Lord's final message to us in Rev. 21:27- nothing will *go into* the Kingdom of God which *defiles*. Surely He had in mind the words He had spoken here 30 years previously. Nothing can go into and defile- but a *person* can. The Lord is showing that defilement is a personal matter, not a question of avoiding eating or touching 'unclean' things. The whole discussion here about defilement is in the context of the Pharisees criticizing the disciples for eating "with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands" (Mk. 7:2 s.w.). Paul had meditated upon the Lord's teaching here deeply, because he clearly alludes to it in saying that he is "persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [s.w. 'defiled'] in itself" (Rom. 14:14). Again we see the nature of the living word- these black words on white paper, those shimmering images on our screens, become the Lord Jesus reasoning with us and persuading us over issues.

*But the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man-* Mt. 15 says "what proceeds out of the mouth". Here we see the huge importance placed by the Lord upon our words. He goes on to explain that it is what comes out of the *heart* which defiles, but words are an expression of the heart. Therefore by them we shall be judged (Mt. 12:37). What comes out of the heart is what comes out of the mouth (Mt. 15:18)- ultimately, at least, after we have finished all the hypocritical games of trying to say one thing whilst thinking otherwise. And Mark adds that what comes out of *the man*, what comes out "from *within*", is what defiles him (Mk. 7:15,23). A man is his heart and so he is his words, just as "the word was [and is] God". We note that the same word is used about gracious words 'proceeding out of [the Lord's] mouth' (Lk. 4:22). They were a reflection of the grace deep within Him, which *is* Him. And likewise ungracious words are not to 'proceed' [s.w.] from *our* mouths, but only words that "may minister grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

7:16 *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear-* We are granted potential hearing as a gift from God; this is the element of calling and predestination by grace. But we must respond; we must use that gift of spiritual hearing to "hear" in the sense of obedience.

7:17 *When he had entered a house away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about the parable-* Matthew says it was Peter who asked, but Mark as Peter's gospel omits this. The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18; see on 8:29). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said earlier about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the "parable" Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just



spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a "parable". In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

*7:18 And he said to them: Are you without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever from without goes into the man, it cannot defile him-* The world would not perceive (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18; 8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had.

*7:19 Because it does not go into his heart but into his belly and is eliminated [this he said, thus making all foods clean] -* See on Acts 10:35,36. Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records.

Jesus clearly explained that nothing a man eats can spiritually defile him; it is what comes out of the heart which does this (Mark 7:15-23). "In saying this, Jesus declared *all* foods 'clean'" (Mark 7:19 NIV). Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

*7:20 And he said: That which proceeds out of the man is what defiles the man-* "The man" is here paralleled with "the heart of men" in :21. A man is his heart, his mind. Whatever external appearances and acts are achieved, the Lord looks upon the heart because He looks upon the man.

I have repeatedly used this verse to demonstrate that sin comes from within, and not from any cosmic being called 'Satan'. If indeed Satan is responsible for initiating human sin, then this would be the classic place for the Lord to teach it. Instead, He traces sinful words and actions to

their true source, the heart. That, in the end, is the great 'satan', or adversary. "Out of the heart" parallels "out of the *mouth*" (:18)- the implication is surely that sin is committed through the route of heart - mouth - action. The Lord heavily condemns thought (heart) and words (mouth) because these are considered not sinful, or not very sinful, by human judgment. What one thinks internally is not a criminal act in any court of law, and what one says is only rarely so. External actions are all important in human judgment (remember the context is of washing at meal times)- the Lord is saying that thought and word are the essence which God looks at rather than the external action. What comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart- that is the clear teaching. And yet we fool ourselves into thinking that we can think one thing, and say something else with our mouth. The Lord's parallel would suggest that sooner or later, that breaks down, and words reflect thought.

The Pharisees were concerned about things entering a person and defiling them. The Lord perceptively noted that this implied that a person was basically clean, and just needed to avoid contamination by externalities. His teaching attacked that base assumption- He taught that the inward parts of a man were the source of defilement. This difference in perspective is reflected in differing approaches to the Gospel today. Some focus upon the need for social reform and improvement of the circumstances surrounding people, believing that the right external environment will lead to reformation of life. I favour the approach taken by the Lord- that the essence is of internal reformation, so that in whatever external environment we are living, the internal spirit is pure. The Lord reasons from the very structure of the human alimentary canal, that unclean food is naturally passed out of our system. But there is no such natural, inbuilt ability to deal with matters of the heart. The implication could be that we therefore need external intervention in the arena of the human heart in order to be cleansed and have strength against defilement- and this is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that 'spirit' usually refers to the mind / heart. It may be that the Lord is not so much teaching the need to somehow control the fountain of potential defilement thrown up by the heart- as implying that we need a new, cleansed heart. This is what was promised as part of the new covenant (Ez. 18:31; 36:26), and those in Christ have entered that new covenant and received the promised gift of the Spirit to transform the human heart, the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

7:21 *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts-* Matthew's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar. The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable

in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have often found myself doing this when speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

The Greek for "thoughts" means reasonings or disputings (s.w. Phil. 2:14). The Lord surely had in mind the cunning but carnal reasoning of the Pharisees which is mentioned at the start of this section (15:1-6). There are separate Greek words used here for "evil" and "thoughts"; but every single one of the 14 New Testament usages of the word *dialogismos* ("thoughts") is in a distinctly sinful context (Mk. 7:21; Lk. 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38; Rom. 1:21; 14:1; 1 Cor. 3:20; Phil. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 2:4). Yet the word itself has no moral overtone, it means simply 'to think / reason'. But the point is, that human thinking is so often sinful, and is the root cause of sinful behaviour.

*Fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries-* Notice the purposeful juxtaposition of bad *thinking* next to murder. This confirms the Lord's constant emphasis that the thought is equivalent to the action in His judgment. Murder, adultery and fornication have already been defined in the Sermon on the Mount as being essentially performed in the heart. The list of seven sins here is surely intended to encompass all sin in totality (seven)- whatever specific sin there may be, it originated in a human heart.

*7:22 Covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness-* Perhaps the list of evil behaviours here is exactly what the Lord considered the Pharisees to be guilty of in their hearts. There is no shortage of evidence that they were guilty of all these things beneath their appearance of hyper righteousness.

*7:23 All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man-* The Greek *koinoo* ["defiles"] strictly means 'to make common'. The later New Testament uses it in a quite different and spiritual way, speaking of how there is a "common faith" (Tit. 1:4; Jude 3) which means that the community of believers are bound together by what they have "in common" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). The Lord's new Israel had new principles. If the heart was cleansed, then the focus moved from fear of

collective *defilement* to rejoicing in and experiencing what we have *in common* in Christ.

7:24 *From there he arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and wanted no one to know it; but he could not be hidden-* Mt. "He withdrew". The word is used of fleeing persecution or avoiding difficult circumstances (Mt. 2:12-14,22) and often about Jesus (Mt. 4:12; 12:15 "when Jesus knew it, He *withdrew Himself*"; 14:13 "When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence"). We get the sense of the Lord desperately needing to be away from the crowds, out of the limelight, alone with the Father and the disciples. And yet so often when He makes such a withdrawal, the crowds follow Him, or human need is felt by Him to an almost overpowering extent, so that He again comes into the public view. This need to 'withdraw' may simply have been from basic human fatigue, both physical and psychological. Or there may also have been the desire to focus upon training the twelve rather than being side-tracked by trying to give surface level fragments of teaching to the crowds who were clearly more interested in miracles than in His teaching. Recall how at the end of chapter 12 and from chapter 13 onwards, the Lord turned away from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

The Lord had emphasized earlier that His mission was not to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of Israel. Perhaps He decided to go to Gentile areas in order to avoid engagement with the crowds and focus upon the disciples. But again, His humanity is indicated by the fact that even that plan had an outcome that He didn't foresee, in that there He met a Gentile woman who so deeply impressed Him by her perception that He healed her daughter.

7:25 *But immediately a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of him, came and fell down at his feet-* "But immediately" shows that the Lord was proven mistaken in thinking that by going to a Gentile area, he would be away from public ministry and able to focus upon teaching the twelve. He as a human did not have full knowledge, and things at times turned out differently to how He expected; just as in His work as a *tekton* ["carpenter"] He may well have made mistakes and misjudgements as He cut and sawed and measured.

7:26 *Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by race-* Matthew says she was a "Canaanite". Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament as very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on Mt. 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and

shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on Mt. 15:21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

*And she pleaded with him to cast out the demon from her daughter-* Matthew: "My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon". The very same words were repeated by the man of Mt. 17:15. He likewise asked for *mercy* to be shown to his *son*, as she had asked for her daughter, because he was likewise "badly vexed" (the same two Greek words are used). Just as she was inspired by the blind men of Mt. 9:27, so she in her turn inspired another man who heard of her story. This is how communities can get into an upward spiral of spiritual growth. The idea was that a demon had possessed the daughter and was controlling her, perhaps [as was thought] convulsing her. However, today we understand what causes convulsions- and it isn't demons. The language of being controlled by demons is clearly phenomenological, the language of the day for illnesses which were otherwise inexplicable to the people of the time. The healing of the daughter resulted in her being "whole" or "healed" (Mt. 15:28). The implied 'driving out of demons' was simply another way of saying she was cured.

*7:27 And he said to her: Let the children first be filled, for it is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs-* The idea could be of taking the food the children were eating, and giving it to the dogs. Or, the Greek could equally mean 'the food intended for the children'. In this case, the Lord would be implying that He had received food to give to the children, and it was inappropriate for Him to instead throw it to the dogs rather than giving it to the children. The *artos*, "bread", is specifically bread rather than food in general. The bread obtained by the Lord is easily understandable as salvation; Judaism expected Messiah to bring manna for Israel, and the Lord makes it clear in John 6 that the manna He would give was Himself and salvation in Him. The bread of Israel was to be the salvation of the world, but it was only given to the world because of Israel's rejection of it. In this we see the economy of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs. Israel (the children) didn't want to eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in

our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

7:28 *But she answered and said to him*- Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

*Indeed, Lord*- A word signifying her assent to what the Lord had just said. She agreed with the position that the bread of salvation was primarily for Israel and that Gentiles were but dogs.

*But even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs*- She perceived the healing of her daughter as a mere "crumb" compared to the bread of the Kingdom, full salvation, which had been obtained for Israel by Jesus. She perceived too that that great salvation had been rejected by them, or at best, treated carelessly and without due respect, in that crumbs had fallen to her. The Lord at the end of Matthew 12 and throughout His subsequent parables of chapter 13 had explained how Israel had rejected the Gospel, and that He was therefore turning to the disciples for response. The parables of Matthew 13 were His attempt to help the disciples come to terms with the fact that in reality, Israel had rejected John's message. But this woman perceived it well, and thereby perceived that the bread of salvation must therefore be available to the Gentiles if Israel didn't want it. In this she was far ahead of the disciples themselves. It could be argued that she was not *seeking* 'crumbs', in the sense of equating the hoped for healing with the crumbs. It could be that she is saying that she is already eating of those crumbs, in that she felt she was feeding on whatever small parts of the bread of salvation were possible for her as a Gentile. She says that the dogs *are eating* the crumbs- rather than begging for them. The Lord was so deeply impressed by the woman's use of metaphor that He Himself builds it into a later parable- Lazarus the beggar desired to eat the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). The rich man clearly represents Judaism, which was to be condemned and rejected, whilst the beggar was saved. In this we see the Lord's humility as well as His sensitivity; He was deeply impressed by the woman, and absorbed her use of metaphor into His own mental material.

We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for 'master', and I noted on Mt. 15:22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios*, "Lord". There is no Biblical nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as 'masters' or 'lords' of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking of *His* table, with the bread of Israel's salvation placed upon it *by Him*, as the lord of the house and the feast- with the Jewish children

sitting disinterested and disrespectfully at the table, throwing the food to the eager dogs beneath the table. It was exactly the attitude of the Lord Jesus to table fellowship, His eating with Gentiles and sinners, which was what led the children of Israel to reject Him. And this incident is sandwiched between the records of the feeding miracles, in which the Lord dealt His bread to all and sundry, including Gentiles. This amazing woman accepted Jesus as her Lord even though she felt that she was not fit to sit at His table; she got to be at His table by being as a dog. This amazing devotion to her Lord, fully accepting the barriers there were between them brought about by ethnic birth circumstances beyond her control- resulted in the Lord tearing down those barriers. Significantly, Paul uses the very same Greek words in 1 Cor. 10:21 about eating at the Lord's table- and he has the breaking of bread service in mind. The sharing of table fellowship with Gentiles was a highly divisive issue in the communities of Jewish Christians who first responded to Matthew's Gospel. He is surely making the point that in a strange way, Gentiles partook of the Lord's table in that even the dogs under the table still eat what is on the table. And this happened even during the Lord's ministry. They were "under the table" (Mk. 7:28)- but still *at* the table.

*7:29 And he said to her: For this saying go your way. The demon is gone out of your daughter-* This shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

I think the extraordinary sensitivity of the Lord Jesus is reflected in the many examples of Him displaying extraordinary perception and precognition of what had happened or was going to happen. He had felt that Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree before they even met (Jn. 1:48); He knew the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter had been cured; He knew the thoughts of men, etc. Now all this may have been due to the Father directly beaming that knowledge into Him through a Holy Spirit gift of knowledge. Maybe. And this was the explanation I assumed for many years. But I have noticed in myself and others that at times, we too have flashes of inexplicable precognition; we somehow know something's happened. I remember sitting next to a sister, and she suddenly came over looking distressed. She simply said: "John B's mother has just died". And so indeed it was. I think we've all had such things happen. And we share the same nature which the Lord had. So my restless mind wonders, and no more than that, whether His extraordinary precognition was not simply a result of a bolt of Holy Spirit knowledge, but rather an outflow of His extraordinary sensitivity to other people and their situations. This Lord is our Lord, the same today as He was back then yesterday. In any case,

living as such a sensitive person in such a cruel and insensitive and blunt world would itself have been almost unbearable. And yet He was like that for us, the insensitive, the ignorant, the selfish and the uncaring, in so many moments of our lives.

*7:30 And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed-* "She found" could suggest that she did not have complete faith that it had happened until she saw it. The mention that her daughter was lying on the bed, calm, draws a similarity with the healing of Jairus' daughter; as if to say that there were certain hallmarks to the Lord's ministry and work amongst people. We see the same today, and this forms the basis of fellowship between those the Lord has touched. Presumably the girl had been running around in a wild state due to her illness; which means the mother had shown all the more faith in leaving her in order to go to the Lord. The Ethiopic text adds that she was lying "clothed", suggesting that she had previously torn off her clothes due to her vexation.

The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

It was done unto her daughter, for her sake- an example of a third party being healed or blessed by the Lord in response to the faith of another person (see Mk. 2:5 for another example- the paralyzed man was cured for the sake of the faith of his friends). This sets a challenging precedent for us in our prayers for others. John seems to consciously allude to the Lord's words here when recording how the Lord stated a general principle, that if His words abide in us "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7; see too Mt. 18:19). The Lord was setting up that woman as the role model of all who would believe in Him.

*7:31 And again he left from the borders of Tyre and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the borders of Decapolis-* The Lord was now meeting those to whom the healed Legion had preached to. He had purposefully stopped Legion from coming with him, so that Legion could instead witness where he was. Just as the Lord made a point of visiting the home areas of His disciples, so now He returns to Legion's home area. This following up on the work of His converts continues today, as He partners with us in our local witnessing.

*7:32 And they brought to him one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand upon him-* Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35;



Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to be seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

*7:33 And he took him aside from the crowd, and in private put his fingers into his ears, and he spat, and touched his tongue-* The Lord as ever sought to avoid showmanship; He wanted that man to have an intimate personal relationship with Him, knowing that the whole incident would be programmatic for all He does in opening the ears of every believer in Him. The Lord's saliva was to touch the man's saliva; the Lord's spirit and words were to be mixed with the man's. Fingers in the ears spoke of deafness; the man was to become deaf in order to hear- suggesting that the true hearing is from being deaf to the world and open to the word of the Lord Jesus. The finger of God was what touched Egypt in causing the plagues (Ex. 8:19; Lk. 11:20); it refers to His power. It is that same immense power which works in opening a man's ears, if he so wishes them to be opened, to attend to the word of Jesus. But in subsequent life, he must hear the Lord's word and mix his spirit with the Lord's. But it was "the finger of God" which wrote the old covenant on tables of stone (Ex. 31:18; Dt. 9:10). The Lord may be implying that a new covenant was being now written on the man's mind, through the words / saliva of the Lord Jesus. For the new covenant is to be written by God on human hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). And by grace, the Lord takes the initiative in doing this to people, leaving them to respond further.

Because the tongue controls swallowing, surely the man was frothing in his own spittle. And yet the Lord spits and puts His spittle on that of the man, to show His complete ability to identify with the human condition. The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

There is however another take on the passage, which the grammar does allow. It is the paraphrase suggested by Adam Clarke: "And Jesus took him aside from the multitude: and [the deaf man] put his fingers into his ears, intimating thereby to Christ that they were so stopped that he could

not hear; and having spat out, that there might be nothing remaining in his mouth to offend the sight when Christ should look at his tongue, he touched his tongue, showing to Christ that it was so bound that he could not speak: and he looked up to heaven, as if to implore assistance from above: and he groaned, being distressed because of his present affliction, and thus implored relief: for, not being able to speak, he could only groan and look up, expressing by these signs, as well as he could, his afflicted state, and the desire he had to be relieved. Then Jesus, having compassion upon him, said, Be opened: and immediately his ears were opened, so that he could hear distinctly; and the impediment to his speaking was removed, so that he spake properly".

*7:34 And looking up to heaven-* This is typical of how the Lord prayed, with no barrier between Him and the Father; and He invites us to share the same relationship with the Father which He had, enabled by the gift of the Comforter.

*He sighed-* This is the Greek word used for our groaning in desire for the Kingdom situation to come about on earth, and for an end to our limited human condition (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2,4). The Lord knows those groans, for He had them Himself. Therefore His healing of this man, as noted on :32, was to provide a foretaste of His Kingdom. The same word is used of the Lord's intercession for us now with "groanings" (Rom. 8:26). This incident of healing, for which the Lord groaned in prayer for it to happen, is therefore a cameo of His present intercession for us. But let us note that His groaning / sighing was not simply in frustration at the human condition, but it merged into prayer to the Father. And this is important for us to follow; otherwise our groanings are merely the groaning complainings of Israel in the wilderness.

*And said to him: Ephphatha, that is, Be opened-* Recording the Aramaic term used is another indication that this was written by a genuine eyewitness. "Opened" is a term which tends to be used of the opening of ears in understanding (Lk. 24:31,32,45; Acts 16:14; 17:3). The literal opening of his ears was therefore so that his understanding be opened. The Aramaic term "ephphatha" is perhaps used to direct our attention to its Old Testament usage. Israel were the ones whose ears were not opened (Is. 48:8), whereas the ears of Messiah were opened (Is. 50:5). The same Hebrew term is used as "ephphatha". The Lord's ears had been opened, and now He opened the ears of this man- so that the man might be "in Him", and respond to the Father's word as the Lord had done.

*7:35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly-* Again, the language of the day is used; the idea that dumb people were literally tongue-tied is alluded to. The more essential idea is that the Lord through His word, His saliva, His spirit, had broken the ties that bind, that seem unmoveable. "Plainly", *orthos*, literally means 'correctly, rightly'. The miracle worked upon the man's

mind by the Lord's spirit and word was to result in right speaking and action from then onwards in the man's life. We are reminded of 2 Cor. 3:12: "Seeing then that we have such hope, we have great plainness of speech". The bold, plain speaking of the disciples in the early chapters of Acts is an example of how this works out in practice in human life.

*7:36 And he ordered them that they should tell no one. But the more he ordered them, the more widely they proclaimed it-* See on Mk. 5:19,20. The Lord didn't want the man distracted from his spiritual transformation by mass popular interest in him. And yet those who heard him speak would be amazed. And we noted on :35 that plain speaking was a feature of the early preachers of the Gospel. The Lord's idea was that the quiet witness of just living ordinary live, speaking plainly and hearing others, was going to be witness enough to Him, without any need for dramatic claims about healing.

*7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying: He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak-* This is an echo of how every stage of creation / 'doing' was pronounced "very good". The Lord's healings were not just done for the sole sake of addressing human need; but in order to create a new creation of persons who would exist to God's glory.

# MARK CHAPTER 8

8:1 *In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him, and said to them-* We often meet this note in the Gospels. The implication is surely that if discipleship involves being with and following Jesus, then the disciples are therefore recording their own weakness in noting that they were often *not* with Jesus and had to be called unto Him. And it is observable that in many of the cases of being called to Him, they were somehow astray in action or attitude- separated from Him not just physically. The Greek specifically means 'to call towards', and so the pattern is established of the Lord's basic call being repeated throughout the course of our discipleship.

8:2 *I pity the crowd-* The Lord called His men unto Him, and informed them that He had compassion on the hungry multitude. He said no more than that. But the disciples immediately started bleating on about how there was no way they had the money nor ability to arrange so much bread in a deserted place. They understood that their Lord had transferred His compassion onto them; all that was true of Him became true for them. *He* wanted to feed the multitude; *He* was feeling compassionate to the crowd; so, axiomatically, so must they. And so must we today, as we face the crowds too. Whatever are the feelings, the mind, of Jesus towards this world; so must our mind be. And He came, without controversy, above all to give His all, to die, for this world's redemption.

*Because they have continued with me-* The same word for "continued" is used about believers 'cleaving unto' Jesus (Acts 11:23). The Lord uses the same word about His wish for the disciples to continue with Him in the heat of temptation in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:38), and it is the same word used so often in John for 'abiding' with Christ. The Lord was more sceptical about the (Jewish) crowd in the earlier feeding miracle (of the 5000), later commenting that their interest was largely in the food. This more Gentile crowd (see on Mt. 15:31) He felt were abiding with Him in a more spiritual sense.

*For three days-* The provision of manna, the bread of salvation, after three days... this is surely prophetic of the resurrection. The Lord could have fed them at the end of the first day- three days is a long time not to eat, and they were at the point of losing consciousness due to lack of food ("they will faint in the way"). The Lord surely didn't provide food earlier in order to prove the level of interest. Surely many did walk away in search of food. But 4000 (at least) remained. It certainly was a great expression of sincere interest in the Lord's message, and compares favourably to that of the crowd of 5000, who were fed after only a few hours. The disciples' desire to dismiss this extraordinary group therefore appears even worse.

*And have nothing to eat-* The same Greek phrase is on the Lord's lips in Mt. 25:32, where He says that condemnation awaits the man who gives 'nothing to eat' to those who are hungry. The disciples like many of us assume automatically that it can't be their problem to provide others' needs if they don't have what is required materially. But the connection between this verse and Mt. 25:32 puts that assumption under a spotlight. Even if we do not have what is needed, our confrontation with that need requires to exercise faith that that need will be resolved. And the resolution of it may well depend upon our *faith*. This doesn't mean that we ask that material resources are dropped from Heaven into *our* hands, but rather than they will be provided in order to meet the need.

8:3 *And if I send them away to their homes without food, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from far away-* This is a hint at Gentile presence in the crowd- hence the crowd are described as glorifying "the God of Israel" (Mt. 15:31). The Lord certainly made no attempt to decide who was pure, or who was Jew and who was Gentile; He shared His bread with all who were in need, as He does today, regardless of moral circumstance. By sharing fellowship in this way He seeks to transform and change those who are willing to sit with Him.

8:4 *And his disciples answered him: Where shall one be able to find bread for these men here in such a desolate place?-* The wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasise his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?".

"Where can" is literally "Whence can a man...". Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully

human, of our nature, our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

*8:5 And he asked them: How many loaves have you?-*

*And they said: Seven-* The feeding of the 4000 is clearly recorded in the same style and with much the same language as the feeding of the 5000. We are surely intended to place the events together. Five loaves were used in the healing of the 5000, and seven here- making a total of 12 loaves. Jewish minds would surely have thought of the 12 loaves on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5). Moses personally was to "set them" on the table in rows (Lev. 24:1,6), which connects with how the loaves were "set" before the people (Mk. 8:6), who at the feeding of the 5000 were set down in rows (Mk. 6:40 Gk.). The hint was clearly that the most sacred bread of Judaism, the 12 loaves of the showbread, were being set before Gentiles, women, children and secular Jews- by non-priests, the disciples. And all were welcome to partake, without testing their qualification. The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death was only really making public that which the Lord had already achieved in His life.

*8:6 And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground-* The Greek really means to recline at table. This is another indication that He was presenting as it were the Messianic banquet, and fellowshipping at table in a spiritual sense with whoever wished to be present.

*And he took the seven loaves and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and they set them before the crowd-* The same Greek words for 'took' and 'loaves' have just been used in Mt. 15:26, where the Lord told the Gentile woman that it was not appropriate to 'take' the 'bread' (s.w. "loaves") intended for Israel and give them to the Gentiles. But now, He does just that (bearing in mind the evidence that this is a partly Gentile crowd). The impression is surely that the woman's spiritual perception deeply impressed the Lord, to the point that He decided the time had come to begin giving Israel's bread to the Gentiles. This openness in both the Father and Son is a function of their supreme sensitivity to men. See on Mt. 16:5.

The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid

relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on.

8:7 *And they had a few small fishes; and having blessed them, he commanded to set these also before them-* Mark's record speaks as if the fish were something of an afterthought (Mk. 8:7); the use of the diminutive word for *little* fish suggests they thought them hardly worth mentioning. The stress (in Mark) is that *they* had a few small fish. The situation is of course purposefully similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. They were really intended to learn from it. But they didn't. There were some differences, and one of them was that this time, their own small amount of food was used rather than that of the boy. The Lord was seeking to show that what little they personally had, fish they had personally caught but felt inadequate for the task, could and would be used by Him in order to meet the hunger of the Gentile world.

8:8 *And they ate and were filled-* The Lord has just said to the Gentile woman that the Jews must first be "filled" (s.w. Mk. 7:27) before the Gentile dogs are fed. The feeding of the 4000 comes soon after the Lord's encounter with that woman. It seems the point is that the Lord judged that the time had now come to fill the Gentiles. For this was largely a Gentile crowd (see on :3).

*And they gathered seven baskets of broken pieces that remained over-* According to Mk. 8:19-21, one of the reasons behind the Lord telling them to do this was simply to make them more deeply aware of the huge amount of bread which the Lord had created- to the point that they should realize that things like bread, and indeed all physical externalities, were just ultimately insignificant to the Lord.

Literally, 'the breakages'. The word is only ever used in the Gospels about the broken pieces of bread from the feeding miracles. The related verb *klaō*, to break, is used only of the 'breaking of bread' in the feeding miracles, and every other occurrence in the New Testament concerns the breaking of bread service in memory of Jesus (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:7,11; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Clearly the breaking of bread in the miracles is intended to be seen as programmatic for the later 'breaking of bread' services. In this connection it becomes highly significant that there were Gentiles participating, along with women and children, and there was no 'test of fellowship' operated. The simple fact people wanted to be present around Jesus was enough.

"What was left over" is Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the

hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

The incident is surely placed next to that of the Gentile woman eating the 'crumbs' in order to show the eagerness of the Gentiles for the bread of Israel. The amazing example of going three days without food in order to receive spiritual food demonstrated beyond doubt the legitimacy of Gentile interest in the Messianic bread / manna of the Kingdom.

*8:9 And they were about four thousand; and he sent them away-* The way the number of eaters is presented at the end of the meal might suggest that this is the equivalent of a bill being presented at the conclusion of a meal. If this is the case, then the hint would be towards Is. 55:1,2, where again we have the theme of free provision of food, and being utterly filled / satisfied: "Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness".

The Greek of this verse is identical to the conclusion concerning the feeding of the 5000. The similarity between the two feeding miracles is very pointed and extensive. The point may simply be that the Lord was consciously repeating a situation so that the disciples would have the chance to put into practice what they should have learnt from the earlier situation. This principle would explain the strong sense of *déjà vu* which surely all of us have observed in the course of our lives.

*8:10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went into the region of Dalmanutha-* There is no contradiction with Mt. 15:39 which says they came into the region of Magdalla; Dalmanutha would have been a village within the region of Magdalla. Different words for "region" are used by Matthew and Mark. Perhaps Matthew focuses on "Magdalla" because he may be wishing to say that this was the area from which Mary of Magdalla [Magdalene] was from.

*8:11 And the Pharisees came and began to question him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, testing him-* This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system. This appears an exact repetition of the situation in Mt. 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims



based on the similarity with Mt. 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

The implication of requesting a sign "from heaven" was that the Lord's miraculous signs were from 'satan', from beneath rather than from above. This was tantamount to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. See notes on Mt. 12:38,39.

8:12 *And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said-* As noted on 7:34, this is the word used about the Lord as "the Lord the Spirit" groaning for us in mediation (Rom. 8:26), reflecting how our groaning or sighing for the Kingdom age is known by Him too even now (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2,4).

*Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, No sign shall be given to this generation-* Matthew says there would be no sign given apart from that of Jonah being three days within the fish. Here we have a parade example of how the correct picture will only be arrived by careful reading of the whole Bible. A sign was given; but there was no other sign given apart from that one sign.

8:13 *And he left them, and again got into the boat and departed for the other side of the lake-* The original words suggest that this is more than a mere notice of the Lord moving on. The Greek for "left" can imply a more conscious and formal abandoning (see examples in Mt. 19:5; Lk. 5:28; Acts 18:19). This would be in line with how in the similar incident in Mt. 12:38-45, the Lord had decided to 'leave' the masses of Israel and instead focus upon a minority. He 'left' the majority in the wilderness and went after the one lost sheep until He found it (Lk. 15:4 s.w.). In Matthew 12, the Lord made clear His change in policy- that He was leaving a wicked and adulterous generation and focusing upon the few who had truly responded, i.e. the group of disciples. But here He is again reasoning with the Jews and again formally leaving them. This is not inconsistency, but rather is such behaviour typical of the love that always hopes, that draws a line and yet revisits it in the hope that some will still change. Paul's behaviour to the Jews was the same- having turned away from them and towards the Gentiles, he still revisits the Jews in hope they will yet respond to Christ (Acts 13:46).

8:14 *And they forgot to take bread; and they did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them-* This is the very same Greek phrase used about the Lord 'taking the bread' in the feeding miracles (Mt. 14:19; 15:36). The phrase is used a total of 23 times- here, about the taking of

bread in the feeding miracles, and about 'taking bread' at the breaking of bread service. To 'take bread' therefore refers to an act of religious significance- for the 'taking of bread' in the feeding miracles was clearly invested with deeper meaning, as brought out in John 6. The disciples at this point seem to have sensed that there was something significant in 'taking bread'- but they had not figured out what. Because when the Lord warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they assume He is referring to their failure to 'take bread'. Their slowness to understand is really brought out in the record.

8:15 *And he ordered them, saying: Take heed! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod-* The Lord had earlier used yeast as a symbol of influence and effect worked by teaching (Mt. 13:33). But they didn't grasp that He meant 'beware of the influence and teaching of the Jewish leaders'- even though that had been such a major theme of His teaching from the beginning. Instead, they superstitiously felt that they must be at fault concerning 'bread' because the Lord had mentioned yeast, and so they concluded that the Lord considered their forgetting to 'take bread' as being somehow sinful. They were really so far off in understanding, and yet the Lord elsewhere speaks so positively about their understanding of His message.

The preaching of the Kingdom by us is likened to leaven- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the 'lump' of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

Their fear that they might have done something ritually wrong regarding bread was an outcome of their being influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their doctrines led to folk like the disciples becoming paranoid and self-suspicious over issues which were irrelevant, and indeed a distraction from the thrust of the Lord's teaching and intended way of life for His followers. The same effect can be observed in sincere believers who have fallen under the influence of Christian legalists.

8:16 *And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread-* Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes

"reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

"One with another" gives the impression of the disciples away from Jesus, huddled together keeping out of the Lord's earshot- and He perceives what they are whispering, and raises the issue with them (Mt. 16:8).

*8:17 And Jesus perceiving it said to them: Why do you so reason, because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart so hardened?*- Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- and they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel. See on Mk. 7:18.

*8:18 Having eyes, can't you see? And having ears, can't you hear? And do you not remember?*- One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord's struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had done. His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone. There's so much we don't perceive as we should, so much we are blind to. And this blindness separates us from God. It frustrates the Lord Jesus; he is angry when those who have eyes to see (i.e. have been converted) still don't see.

*8:19 When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you gather? They said to him: Twelve-* The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers. John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

8:20 *And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you gather? And they said to him: Seven-* The Lord intended them to see a connection between the *seven* loaves and the *seven* baskets full of fragments which they gathered. For each loaf, there was a basket of fragments. Perhaps His idea was that effectively, the people didn't eat the bread; each loaf was just broken into pieces by the Lord and then left on the ground by the crowd. The idea would be [as stated in John 6] that the bread provided represented the Lord and His message, which for the most part was discarded by the crowds, who were simply hooked on getting to see or feel a miracle.

8:21 *And he said to them: How is it that you do not yet understand?*- On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord's words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus after two miracles relating to bread, they failed to see that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord.

The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it.

8:22- see on Mk. 5:1.

*And they went to Bethsaida. And they brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him-* Perhaps the "they" was the disciples, seeing that Philip was from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), and that despite the Lord having done many miracles in this village previously, they still had not repented (Mt. 11:21).

8:23 *And he took hold of the blind man by the hand and brought him out of the village; and when he had spat on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw anything-* Trying to do the miracle as privately as possible and using His saliva is very similar to the healing of the deaf man in 7:33. Again the idea, as noted there, was that the Lord wanted the healed man to subsequently 'see' Him; and to see in the cure something intimate between Himself and the Lord. The Lord's spirit and word was represented by His saliva. This was what was to give the man spiritual vision.

Ultimately, we will only truly see in the Kingdom (Is. 29:18; 42:6; 1 Cor. 13:12). Then we will know (see) face to face. We will see God face to face, i.e. understand Him. It follows therefore that in some ways we are blind, or partially sighted, now. This is indicated by the Lord's symbolic healing of the blind man in two stages (Mk. 8:23-26). Firstly, the man saw men as if they were walking trees. Probably he scarcely knew what a tree or man looked like. Yet he is described as receiving his sight at this stage (8:24 Gk.). And then the Lord touched his eyes again, and again he is described (in the Greek) as receiving his sight (8:25- same phrase as in v.24). This time he saw all things (Gk.) clearly. This surely represents the full spiritual vision of the Kingdom. According to this type, we are at the stage of seeing men as if they are walking trees, perhaps wildly guessing about some things, lacking the most basic sense of proportion. Perhaps when we speak so glibly about "eternal life" or being in the Kingdom, we are speaking as that partially healed blind man.

*8:24 And he looked up, and said: I see men. But I see them as trees, walking-* The healing of the blind man is unusual in that the healing was in two stages. Initially the man only "beheld men as trees, walking". As a blind man, he would have had very limited experience of people. He initially saw them merely as part of the landscape, as important to him as trees. But the aim of the miracle was to convict him of this, and lead him to understand people as more than trees, more than just part of the natural creation with as much meaning as trees. That man represented us all; part of coming to the light, of receiving spiritual sight, is to perceive the value and meaning of persons; to see the world of persons rather than a world of things. No longer will we divide people as the world does into winners and losers, successes and failures; rather will we see in each one we meet a potential brother or sister. For they have all been invited into God's family, insofar as we pass them the invitation.

Having a true, accurate self-perception and appreciating the tremendous significance of the true person as opposed to our mere personas... this affects our relation to others. We will seek to decode the images presented to us by our brethren, and relate to the Christ-man within them, to the real and true person rather than the persona they act out. Because we see the Christ within them, the real Duncan or Dmitry or Ludmila or Sue or Jorge... we will realize that relationships are worth fighting for. The world of unbelievers then becomes perceived as a mass of persons waiting to be born, to become born again after the image of Christ through their conversion and baptism.

8:25- see on Mt. 20:32.

*Then Jesus put his hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And his sight was restored, and he saw everyone clearly-* The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought

for a girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55), and perhaps here He healed the blind man in two stages so that he wouldn't be scared when he first saw people moving. "His sight was restored" is in some manuscripts "he was restored" (as AV). The same word is used of the restoration of the Kingdom (Acts 1:6), which was potentially possible for the Elijah ministry through John the Baptist to achieve (Mt. 17:11). The implication is that "in our lives, Your Kingdom comes". In a limited sense, we as persons become those under the dominion of the King, the Kingdom restored at least in our hearts and vision / outlook. And it is the vision which the Lord gives which enables us to see all men clearly, to see people as we should, to understand the world as a world of persons rather than vague objects we encounter or collide with as we stumble through life.

*8:26 And he sent him away to his home, saying: Do not even enter into the village-* The Lord is recorded in the next verse as going into villages to preach (:27). Perhaps the implication is that the man needed some time, however brief, to prepare him to be able to preach as his Lord did. Some time alone to just get used to seeing, to understand the world through his new eyes, before talking to others about what had happened to him. Paul too had time in the wilderness before his main preaching mission began, as did the Lord.

*8:27 And Jesus went with his disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he questioned his disciples, saying to them-* Again we get the impression that the Lord was working to educate the disciples according to some kind of program. He surely would have loved to ask them this question earlier, but He waited for some reason until they were in Caesarea Philippi. What that reason was isn't clear. Perhaps He wanted to wait until they were back in Jewish territory after their excursion into Gentile territory, the purpose of which had been to get away from the spotlight of publicity and teach the disciples. And like a good teacher, now the Lord tested their apprehension of His teaching.

*Who do men say that I am?-* This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:29). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

*8:28 And they told him, saying: John the Baptist-* Literally, *the* John the

Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

*And others, Elijah-* John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. See on Mt. 11:3. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of Elijah- and not Messiah.

*But others, one of the prophets-* Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God, Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in Mt. 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-

existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account here. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

8:29 *And he asked them: But who do you say that I am?*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

"Say", *lego*, means to talk out loud, and is the same word used in :28. The Lord may have been asking whom they talked about Him as. *Lego* means specifically to talk about; the Lord chose not to use words like 'understand' or 'believe'. Maybe He is alluding to His principle that words express inner thoughts and beliefs. And so instead of asking them whom they *believed* or *thought* Him to be (although that is the essence of His question), He asks them whom they talk about Him as. Because spoken words do ultimately reflect inner faith and understanding.

*Peter answered and said to him*- Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17



Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

*You are the Christ!*- The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are also juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on.

Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark's records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death, it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on Mt. 16:14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession before baptism that he believed that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11) etc. are all examples of this.

Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him?

8:30 *And he ordered them that they should tell no one about him-* The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels. "Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how

Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ. The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of Matthew 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spend time more intensely with them, He asks them not to fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

Matthew has: "That he was the Christ", or as AV "Jesus the Christ"- an unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's Messiahship.

8:31 *And he began to teach them that-* The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

*The Son of Man must suffer many things-* The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

*And be rejected-* The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

*By the elders-* *Presbuteros* is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

*And the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again-* Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there

were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

Mark, who as we have suggested was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord's prediction of the cross was met by the disciples' misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34
Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Qualms of conscience about 'wasting time' can so often be part of a guilty fear of not having 'done' enough. The Lord Jesus was not beset by guilt, and a sensitive reading of the Gospels reflects the way that this ultimately zealous servant of the Lord never appeared to be in hurry. He had ample time to speak to the woman He met at the well (Jn. 4:1-26), to take time out with the disciples (Mk. 8:27), He had the leisure time to admire wild flowers (Mt. 6:28), comment upon a sunset (Mt. 16:2), to go through the lengthy process of washing the feet of His men (Jn. 13:5) and to be able to answer their naive questions without the slightest hint of impatience (Jn. 14:5-10)... and of course to walk some distance to find a place conducive to prayer (Lk. 5:16).

8:32 *And he spoke these things openly-* Mk. 8:32 adds to Matthew's record in saying that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in Mt. 16:20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

*And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him-* When He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40). They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

8:33 *But he, turning about and seeing his disciples-* The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way

the Lord "turned" and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*... if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death. Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

*Rebuked Peter, and said to him: Get behind me, Satan!*- When the Lord said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

"Get" is the same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation, hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (Mt. 16:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in Mt. 16:24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

"Behind Me" is the same word translated "come after Me" in Mt. 16:24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in Mt. 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

The Lord "rebuked" Peter for seeking to stop Him die on the cross. But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be "the Christ of God". The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: "And [Jesus] straitly charged them [s.w. "rebuked"] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing", and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross

carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord "straitly charged" [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn't perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness "Lord and Christ".

*For you are mindful of the things of men instead of the things of God-* Being a 'satan' referred therefore to a state of mind, centred upon human rather than Godly things. The idea of 'Satan' is therefore part of a huge parable, presenting carnal thinking as the great satan / adversary of men.

8:34- see on Gal. 6:10.

*And he called to him the crowd with his disciples, and said to them: If any of you wants to be my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me-* The Lord was addressing all, but He clearly had Peter particularly in mind. For Peter was the one who was going to deny the Lord, rather than deny Himself (s.w. 14:30,31,72). The Lord may have intended them to understand that carrying the cross, dying with Him, was going to mean in practice not denying Him, but rather denying themselves. And Peter failed to perceive this; and Mark is Peter's account of how he preached the Gospel, always pointing out his own failings.

8:35 *For whoever would save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it!*- I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct



interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some ways, in some places, in some aspects*, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation. To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35).

*8:36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?*- As noted on :35, the context is of carrying the cross in preaching the Gospel. The world to be won is the world for Christ, rather than seeking to gain the world for ourselves.

Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: "What will it profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?". Mk. 8:36 has: "What does it [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?". Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally... this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

*8:37 For what should a man give in exchange for his life?*- Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: " Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV " soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the

cross). In this context verse 38 continues: " Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

*8:38 For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels-* See on Rom. 1:16. Being ashamed of the Lord's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8).

The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father. There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves so weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering

for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

# MARK CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he said to them: Truly I say to you: There are some standing here, who shall in no way taste death, before they see the kingdom of God come with power-* The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. "They see the Kingdom of God come" (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by "They see the Son of man coming" (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the 'coming' of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal 'coming' of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

9:2 *And after six days-* Lk. 9:28 speaks of "about an eight days after", reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of 'About a week later'.

*Jesus took with him Peter, James and John-* Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to underestimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing... in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the rock*, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

*And brought them to a high mountain where they could be alone-* Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

*And he was transfigured before them-* The Lord's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that we should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18

s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistening white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

9:3 *And his garments became radiant, exceedingly white, whiter than any launderer could whiten them-* The same word used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used

about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" (Mt.) is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them". The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistening garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.

Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. - "shew" is the same word translated 'to see' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the

new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on Mt. 17:5 *cloud*.

9:4 *And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus-* It was a "vision" (Mt. 17:9). They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (Mt. 17:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfil" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 8. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

9:5 *And Peter said to Jesus: Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah-* Peter, who appears to be the one behind Mark's gospel, is not emphasizing his own superiority here, but rather commenting upon his own distance from the Lord's spirituality. For he presents his offer to put up a tent as being so inappropriate, now he perceived the glory of God which tabernacled in the flesh of the Lord Jesus.

Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death, and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to



say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

9:6 *For he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid-* It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say. The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

9:7 *And there came a cloud overshadowing them-* Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very

personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

*And there came a voice out of the cloud: This is My beloved Son. Hear him-* This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear him" was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

9:8 *And suddenly, looking round about-* "Looking round" is in Matthew "lifting up their eyes". 'Lifted up', *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* ["arise" / 'get up'] of Mt. 17:7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play 'Bible television' here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to 'hear' His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus' touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead... Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples' weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

*They no longer saw anyone with them, except Jesus-* In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to.

For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

9:9 *And as they came down from the mountain, he ordered them that they should tell no one about the things they had seen, until the Son of Man should have risen from the dead-* The things "seen" are called a "vision" in Mt. 17:9. Whilst this literally means 'the thing seen', the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they "appeared in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated "appeared" has the strong sense of 'being seen / observed'. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was "found alone"- but that is a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that "Suddenly, when they had looked round about" they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone 'returned' to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody "except Jesus only with themselves" or "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus" (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for "there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him". It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of 'appearance' used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

"To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't

want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord's glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 "we beheld His glory"), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in "glory" and being "beheld" or 'seen' in that glory.

*9:10 So they kept these words to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant-* As noted on :1, Peter is again bringing out his own slowness to understand the Lord's most obvious teaching about His death; and on that basis, appeals to his audience to do better than him, and comprehend and respond far quicker than he had. This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the disciples were clearly unfamiliar with the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (wilfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

Their question provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

*9:11 And they asked him: Why do the scribes say that Elijah must first come?-* The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes...?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9),

implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

9:12 *And he said to them: Elijah indeed comes first-* There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord... lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things". Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from ungodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why do you baptize then, if you are not that Christ, nor Elijah?" (Jn. 1:25).

*And restores all things-* The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would

therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirqe R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (*John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent. The Lord says that Elijah comes "first", *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John's ministry had failed to bring "all" Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed "restore" the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

*And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?*- Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

9:13 *But I say to you, that Elijah came, and they have also done to him whatever they wanted, even as it is written of him-* The Lord accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32-35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching,

with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things "done" to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will "likewise suffer of them", "of this generation" (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

His question (as it is framed in Matthew) was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often "He answered and said..." something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must "suffer many things" (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

Mk. 9:12 adds to Matthew by adding: "As it is written of him". There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi's prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the "him" refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah's persecution was mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

9:14 *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them-* This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

9:15 *And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed; and running to him saluted him-* They ran up to Him- and He had Peter, James and John with Him. Perhaps His face was shining with the glory He had been exposed to, as the face of Moses did. It is therefore commendable that the people ran to Him rather than shying away from Him as they did from Moses when His face shone, and as the soldiers did when His face likewise shone at His arrest in Gethsemane. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them... greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not



only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event, because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

9:16 *And he asked them: What are you arguing about with them?*- The Lord knew, but He wanted to highlight the inappropriacy of any arguments when in the presence of the Father's glory reflected in His Son. And we can take that lesson. The Greek for "arguing" occurs ten times in the New Testament, nearly always in the context of argument with the Jews. All such legalistic argument ought to fade away in the context of the Lord's glory and the certain hope of the Kingdom, of which the transfiguration had spoken- with the intimation of present transformation towards that end right now.

9:17 *And one of the crowd answered him: Teacher, I brought to you my son, who has a dumb spirit*- When the father of the dumb child brought him to *the disciples*, he tells Jesus that "I brought to *you* my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him; he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (Mt. 10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:28).

9:18 *And wherever it takes him, it dashes him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and pines away*- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). The child was obsessed with fear of condemnation, just as we noted Legion had been. His problem was therefore psychologically rooted, and the language of demons is simply the language of the day to describe his actions and their apparent cure. This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water (Mt.) were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt he was worthy of condemnation-

hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

*And I spoke to your disciples that they should cast it out, and they were not able-* They had no *dunamai* (possibility), in Matthew's record; Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power... over all the power of the enemy... the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

9:19 *And he answered them saying: O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I tolerate you?-* As noted on :17, the "faithless" here were the disciples, not the man; for he had some measure of faith. The disciples were at this point caught up in the faithless spirit of their generation, the world around them; just as we can be. When the Lord returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a "faithless generation" again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... show yourself to the world".

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless. In Matthew chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding

generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2

Sam. 12).

- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.

- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).

- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).

- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

*Bring him to me*- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros Me*, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.

9:20 *And they brought him to him, and when he saw him, immediately the spirit tore at him grievously and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth*- As noted on :18, the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation. When he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, his condition therefore worsened considerably; he

felt he really had arrived at judgment day, and wanted to destroy himself. Again we note that the underlying problem with him was psychological and spiritual, rather than being literally attacked by a demon.

9:21 *And he asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child-* See on Mt. 20:32. This question was perhaps to provoke the man to remember back through those difficult and tragic years, in order to elicit stronger faith and desire from him.

9:22 *And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us-* Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves.

9:23 *And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes-* The father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23 AV). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The same message is taught by putting together the fact that with God nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37), and the fact that nothing is impossible *unto us* (Mt. 17:20). God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature

of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as...so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

The word "believe" is omitted from many texts and from the NEV. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth".

It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

9:24 *Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief!*- See on Lk. 1:13. It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. The father of the epileptic boy is the clearest example. He had asked: "help us" (:22), i.e. 'cure the child'. But he understood that this "help" depended partly upon his faith; he believed, as we should, that the faith of third parties can radically affect others (see on 2:5). And yet he realized that his faith was weak, and he asked the Lord to "help" that faith to be stronger than the native "unbelief" which is part of the human condition. Even faith itself can be "helped". We are not left unaided in climbing the mountain of belief. Faith in that sense is partially a gift from the Lord through the gift of His Spirit (Eph. 2:8; 2 Thess. 3:2). The Lord can succour [s.w. "help"] (Heb. 2:18), through the gift of His Spirit.

9:25 *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter no more into him-* There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today- e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia.

The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water—that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to describe how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him... and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

*9:26 And having cried out and torn him much, it came out; and the boy became as one dead. So much so that the many said: He is dead-* I suggested on :18 and :20 that the young man was obsessed with fear of condemnation at the last day. He now is as it were dead. He goes very still. He feels as if he has died. And then the Lord as it were resurrects him (:27). The whole essence of baptism was being lived out in him at this moment; he was dying to sin, taking its condemnation; and then arising with the Lord Jesus to new life.

*9:27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up, and he arose-* See on :26. This is exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

9:28 *And when he had come into the house, his disciples privately asked him: Why could we not cast it out?*- They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse (in Matthew's record) that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment [in Matthew] that "*If you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed...*" was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

9:29 *And he said to them: This kind-* This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

*Can come out by nothing except by prayer and fasting-* They tried to do miracles without even praying about it. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party and the extent of their faith- both that of the man, and of the disciples.

The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it. Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on



emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

*9:30 And they went from there and passed through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know it-* See on Mt. 27:26; Lk. 9:44. He earnestly wanted time alone with the disciples in order to explain His death to them. This is why when He saw a crowd gathering, He quickly cured the child in order to stop further distraction (:25). We sense throughout the Gospels the Lord's dislike of crowds and His desire to privately teach those who wished to be close to Him; and how the essential burden of His message was of the need to share in His death, rather than getting cures and seeing miracles.

The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

*9:31 For he taught his disciples, and said to them: The Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of men-* Matthew uses the present tense- He is betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. His sufferings were ongoing, His crucifixion sufferings were a seamless continuance of His whole way of life and being during His ministry. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come... the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41). The word for 'betrayed' means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord's statement wouldn't have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

*And they shall kill him, and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again-* Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, "the third

day". This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord's rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

9:32 *But they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask him-* Luke notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden" from them (Lk. 9:45), in confirmation of their own refusal to understand it because it demanded that they too suffer with their Lord. And yet in prayer to the Father, He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

9:33 *And they went to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them: What were you reasoning about on the way here?-* The Lord knew already; He had very keen natural perception as well as God's Spirit without measure. Lk. 5:22 records another incident where the Lord asked men what they were reasoning about exactly because He "perceived their thoughts". He realized the value of verbalizing things. He wanted them to confess; to admit that in the light of Him explaining His death, they had been arguing about who should be the greatest, and who was the greatest. Perhaps the Lord's obvious interest in Peter led them to discuss whether Peter was in fact the greatest, commenting upon his evident impetuosity and other human weaknesses.

9:34 *But they kept quiet. For they had disputed one with another on the way about who was the greatest-* Whenever the Lord taught them about His death, they always seem to have started arguing amongst themselves; the tremendous significance of what He was saying was evidently lost on them (Mk. 9:31-34; 10:34-38). The power of the cross is likewise lost on the hearts of many because of their obsession with petty argument.

9:35 *And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them: If anyone would be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all-* This 'sitting down' may have been some time later than the discussion in :33,34, because at this point Matthew says (Mt. 18:1) that it was they

who came to the Lord with the question about who should be the greatest. The Lord had asked what they had been talking about, knowing this had been the topic. They were silent. And He remained silent. That mutual silence was deafening. They thereby knew that He knew, and that they were wrong. And it was that lack of response from Him which prompted them to finally bring the question out into the open. He was indeed the master psychologist.

He was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). The Lord desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

The Lord Himself on the cross was the ultimate "servant of all", and therefore was the first of all. This may explain the Lord's comment that the last shall be first and the first last (Mt. 19:30)- He may have intended us to read in an ellipsis to the effect that he who *wants to be* first shall be last, and he who *wants to be* last shall be first. There was to be a glorying in being the last, the servant of all- exemplified in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet.

9:36 *And he took a little child and set him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them-* In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in "the washerwoman's shop"- presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of

discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people.

The disciples soon afterwards are framed as doing exactly the opposite to what the Lord had done, when they forbade the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

The Greek for "set" means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus, but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been offputting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving'

others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

"In the midst of them" is a phrase used several times about the Lord Jesus Himself standing in the midst of His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 1:26; 8:9; 20:19,26). The supreme "child" was the Lord Jesus. This connection between Him and that child was it seems perceived by Peter later, when he uses the same word to describe the Lord Jesus as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30). If as suggested the Lord held the child to Himself, the identification would have been visually powerful and the image would've remained with the disciples. The Lord Himself clinches the connection by saying that whoever becomes as that child will be the greatest in the Kingdom- and He clearly was and is the greatest in the Kingdom. Lk. 9:48 makes the connection beyond doubt in recording that the Lord then said that "Whosoever shall receive this child... receives Me". His subsequent comment there that "For he that is least among you all, the same is great" is surely a reference to Himself, rather than urging them to be the least so that they might be the greatest. The Lord's answer as to who was greatest in the Kingdom was therefore to indirectly point out that He is the greatest, and we should simply seek to be like Him, using the little child as a template to that end. The antidote to division, therefore, is to be focused upon Christ and to seek to simply enter the Kingdom- the things of the Kingdom and of the Name (Acts 8:12).

So the Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself. In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

*9:37 Whoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives not me but Him that sent me-* To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom"

(Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. See on Mt. 18:2. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

9:38 *John said to him: Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us-* Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to

receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbade [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

*9:39 But Jesus said: Do not forbid him. For there is no one who shall do a mighty work in my name and then be able straight afterwards to immediately speak evil of me-* The preceding section has sternly warned against forbidding the little ones, and now we have a worked example. The little ones in view were John's disciples (:38); although seeing "John did no miracle" we wonder whether the miracle claimed was legitimate. But the Lord is not only gentle, He seeks to accept even such misunderstanding and misguided ones. For He alludes without doubt to Num. 11:28,29: "Joshua... answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Are you envious for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them". He considered this misguided miracle worker in John's group as all the same one of God's new Israel. As noted on :38, the disciples tended to "forbid" those whom the Lord wished to accept. And that same tension is seen time and again with the way closed, denominational mindsets seek to exclude and "forbid" others who differ and are immature. But the allusion to Numbers 11 seems to be saying that all in whom the Spirit is working should be accepted; and the litmus test is whether they shall "speak evil of me". If they do not, then they are not against Him but for, despite their misunderstanding. An alternative reading however is "Shall not lightly speak evil of me" (as AV). In this case, the Lord is comforting His sceptical disciples that if such a person does is in fact against Him, then this is no light matter and will be dealt with by the Lord's judgment; but not by theirs. This incident is surely alluded to by Paul when he warns against some who claimed to possess the Spirit who 'call Jesus accursed' (1 Cor. 12:3). There were such, and it

was their attitude to the Lord Jesus personally which proclaimed them against Him. What people think of Christ is the critical issue when it comes to deciding whether a person is for or against Him; and that is obvious really, but the natural tendency to "forbid" those who interpret differently to ourselves is strong.

9:40 *For he that is not against us, is for us-* See on :39. If a person is not against the Lord personally (:39), then he is not against "us", the body of Christ. And so even if that person will not mix with us, from God's wider point of view he is "for us", "on our part". Here on earth, sectors of the Lord's body are against each other. But from the Lord's perspective, those who are not against Him are on His part. But speaking evil of the Lord personally (:39) is parallel here with not being against *us*. And here we have a worrying implication. Attitudes to those in Christ are attitudes to Him. To be "against" any of them is to be against Him.

And so the Lord's attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

9:41 *For whoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because you are Christ's- truly I say to you, he shall in no way lose his reward-* Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones doesn't necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for charity. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context says the same. The Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as none less than the likes of Elisha, who were supported in their work by various well-wishers.

According to Mt. 10:41, these "little ones" refer to the disciples. But why "these little ones" and not "you"? I suggest that verse 41 could effectively be a soliloquy, perhaps spoken out loud in the presence of the disciples, but all the same, it is Jesus speaking to Himself. Or maybe the Lord is saying that the mistaken disciple of John would be accepted as one of the Lord's followers, and therefore any who supported him in his slightly misplaced ideals as a missionary for John would therefore still be rewarded. I say this because offering a cup of cold water was how travellers were assisted by local people along the road.



9:42 *And whoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble-* The "little ones" of the context could refer to John's disciples, with their limited belief and understanding in the Lord, who perhaps refused to follow after Jesus because they disagreed with the worldly ways of His disciples. And so the Lord urges the twelve not to cause stumbling to those ones little in faith and understanding. See on Mt. 18:6.

*It would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea-* The very language of Babylon's judgments at the last day. The believer who makes another to stumble by not receiving them is therefore no better than Babylon, the archenemy of God and His true people. And Rev. 18:21 speaks of how *Babylon* shall be cast into the sea as a millstone- such 'believers' will at the last day face Babylon's judgments, they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into it from the judgment seat of Christ to share the world's fate. Even though externally they had been so separate from the world, so separate that they refused to receive the "little ones". But this attitude is in fact a worldly attitude; by having it, we are showing that we are of the world.

9:43 *And if your hand causes you to stumble-* The context has spoken of not offending the little ones, and of the terrible condemnation awaiting those who cause others to stumble. There are two legitimate meanings of the words here. The idea could be 'If these things cause you to stumble others'; or, 'If these things cause you yourself to stumble'. But the ambiguity is surely intentional. If we make others to stumble then we have made ourselves stumble, for if we make others stumble out of the way to the Kingdom, then we shall not be there ourselves. The point is clear- we are to go to absolutely any length, paying any personal cost, in order not to cause stumbling to a little one.

*Cut it off-* I suggest the Lord is parodying the orthodox Jewish idea of cutting off members of the community in order to preserve the rest of the body of believers- an idea equally common today amongst some in the new Israel. The Lord is saying that in order to avoid personal condemnation, we are to cut off our own limbs if necessary- in order to avoid causing a little one to stumble. The cost of not causing the little ones to stumble is therefore very personal; because communities, both secular and religious, tend to cause little ones to stumble by their policies, it follows that individuals will pay a high price for stepping out of line by insisting that we will not cause them to stumble. The preceding verse has explained how "the world", the Jewish religious system of the Lord's time, the *ekklesia* of the day, lead others to stumble, and that individuals must take personal responsibility for this. In the same way as the whole system was destroyed in AD70, so personal condemnation at the last day awaits the individuals who make others stumble.

*It is good for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having your two hands and to go into Gehenna- into the unquenched fire-* The lame, blind and maimed were those not acceptable for service in God's tabernacle (Lev. 21:18; Dt. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:8). The Lord surely has this in mind. He seems to be saying that to avoid offending little ones, it is better to be unacceptable for priestly service now, and yet therefore enter God's Kingdom. The implication, therefore, is that by *not* being seen as fit for priestly service, we avoid offending little ones. The only interpretation which makes sense of this to me is that the Lord foresaw that by fellowshipping the little ones, we may well be excluded from public priestly service in the house of God in this life, because those running the show generally exclude those who think in terms of an open table. But that is a cheap price to pay for entering the Kingdom. And we will be miserably excluded from His Kingdom if we make others stumble by acting in such a way as merely keeps us in with the religious powers that be, that keeps us fit *in their sight* for service. And this again is absolutely true to observation in the body of Christ. Those who are inclusive of little ones tend to be sidelined from public service by those who are decision makers within the ecclesia. But that is a cheap price for entrance to the Kingdom.

It's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model. The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

9:44 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out-* Gehenna was the ravine south of Jerusalem where 'little ones' had been sacrificed to Moloch (Jer. 7:31; 10:5,6; 39:35). So there is an appropriacy in this particular picture of condemnation. Those who stop others entering God's Kingdom and lead them to condemnation will share the same condemnation; what they did to others will be done to them.

9:45 *And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is good for you to enter into life lame, rather than having your two feet and to be cast into Gehenna-* Mk. 9:43-47 spells out the details of the condemnation in laboured detail- if our eye offends, or causes us to offend others, then cut it off, for it is better to be without an eye in this life than to be condemned in Gehenna, where the worm and fire are 'eternal'. And this is repeated concerning the hand and foot. We read of eye, hand and foot together in only one other context- of "eye for eye... hand for hand, foot for foot" being the punishment for damaging a 'little one' within the womb of a woman (Ex. 21:24; Dt. 19:21). Nowhere else in Scripture do these three words occur together. By not receiving a little one, despising them and thus causing them to stumble, we are doing the equivalent of the Old Covenant sin of beating up a pregnant woman and causing handicap to the 'little one' within her. It could be that the Lord is saying that we can be responsible for damaging those who have not yet come to spiritual birth, to the point that if they are born, then they will be born with serious defects which are our fault. And such defects will have been the result of not receiving them, even in their immature state. Thus the table practice of the Lord was to accept people at His table at whatever stage of their spiritual growth or journey, even those not as yet born again, not yet converted, not yet repentant... in order to try to bring them to that point.

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life.

9:46 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out-* The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire and worms for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day). This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from

blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a “little one”, forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it’s quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

*9:47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out. It is good for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes and to be cast into Gehenna-* The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full

well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

9:48 *Where their worm does not die and the fire is not put out-* This threat is repeated several times here. The Lord is emphasizing that condemnation is for real; there is not only an eternal future we may miss, but the experience of condemnation, whilst not eternal, is a significant factor to bear in mind and be influenced by.

9:49 *For everyone shall be salted with fire-* Having spoken of the destruction of the unworthy in Gehenna fire, the Lord went straight on to comment: "For every one shall be salted with (Gk. 'for the') fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted" (Mk. 9:48,49 AV). Unless we become a living sacrifice, wholly consumed by God's fire, laying ourselves down upon the altar, then we will be consumed by the figurative fire of Gehenna at the day of judgment. Again, there's no real choice: it's fire, or fire. See on Mt. 3:11; Lk. 15:24.

9:50 *Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another-* See on Rom. 12:18. The need for peace amongst ourselves as a community is brought out in the parable of the salt that lost its saltiness. Straight away, we're faced with a paradox- for true salt can't lose its saltiness, seeing that sodium chloride is a stable compound, free of impurities. Salt was a symbol in the Lord's teaching for having peace with one another. If we don't have this, we're not salt. If we're not any influence upon others, we're not salt. It's as simple as that.

The Lord realized that it was easy to have an apparent love and peace with our brethren, when actually we have nothing of the sort. In the context of His men arguing with John's disciples, the Lord told a small

parable, in which He made having salt in ourselves equal to having peace with our brethren (Mk. 9:38-40; 49,50). He warned that salt which has lost its saltiness looks just the same as good salt; but salt that has lost its saltiness is *nothing*, it's just a lump of substance. Surely He's saying: 'You may think you have peace and love for your brethren, when actually you don't; and if you don't have it, you're nothing, just a lump'. Not without relevance He mentioned that every sacrifice had to have good salt added to it. His point was that all our devotion and sacrifice is meaningless if it lacks the *real* salt of true love for our brethren. Which is exactly the teaching of 1 Cor. 13. Love is a matter of deep attitude as shown in the small things of life, not the occasional heroism of (e.g.) giving our body to be burned. The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is specifically fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6).

# MARK CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And he left there and went into the regions of Judea on the other side of the Jordan. Crowds gathered around him again, and as was his custom he taught them-* The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- "there", in Judea "beyond Jordan" (Mt. 19:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

10:2 *And there came to him Pharisees, who asked him-* Presumably "there", beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumours of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they "also" came unto Him.

*Is it lawful for a man to send away his wife?-* The parallel record in Matthew 18 has the material arranged according to a chiasmic structure [see note there]. Within that structure, this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on Matthew 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to "put away", because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in Mt. 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could put away / forgive / release his wife "for every cause". In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

*For any cause?-* The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently 'out of the blue'. If the question was simply as to which rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- 'for unfaithfulness'. But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided

giving such direct answers but rather elevated the issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apolo*, to "put away", was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord's usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: 'You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* "every cause"? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel ['every or any cause'] or Shammai [for adultery]'. In terms of connection with the Lord's previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system ["tell it to the *ekklesia* / assembled meeting"]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: "OK, so far so good, Jesus... but really, literally, for every cause, in every case...?". The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn't 'teach divorce'- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord's answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

*They asked this to test him-* Another hint that the source of 'testing' in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

10:3 *And he answered and said to them: What did Moses command you?-* As noted on :4, the emphasis may be on "command"; they were citing a concession for human weakness, "for the hardness of your hearts"; but the Lord is perhaps arguing that a concession is not a command in the legalistic sense they wished to interpret it. Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

10:4 *And they said: Moses permitted a man to write a bill of divorcement and to send her away-* They had missed the point, that a concession ["for



the hardness of your hearts"] is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

"A bill of divorcement", Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

10:5- see on Dt. 31:9.

*But Jesus said to them: For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment-* Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on Mt. 19:4 *Have you not read?*

10:6 *But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them-* It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

10:7 *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife-* The cleaving or clinging spoken of in Genesis is a process; this is an example of how God can work directly upon the heart and psychology of persons to unite them. To give up on the process is therefore to go against what is potentially possible. And those who seek to interfere in and block that intended process, be they parents or extramarital lovers, are equally guilty. The clinging together is part of how God joins married, believing couples together (:9).

10:8 *And the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh-* This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with "what God has joined together" and is not to be sundered.

10:9 *What therefore God has joined together-* As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as *they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

*Do not let man-* By sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God's Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the 'little ones' by despising and not forgiving them. God's processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can choose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the "little ones". And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt. 5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

*Divide-* See on :7. The dividing can be by other parties in addition to the two parties to the marriage. We are not to "let" them do that. The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to "depart" or 'sunder' from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn't mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin, not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or 'fellowship' differences.

10:10 *And in the house the disciples asked him about this matter-* We have recently read how again "in the house" the Lord had explained things further to His disciples (9:28,29, 33-37). This was His style; to provide deeper teaching to those who really wanted it.

10:11 *And he said to them: Whoever shall send away his wife and marry another, commits adultery against her-* The parallel in Matthew 19 includes the exception "for *porneia*", adding that not all can accept His standards here. The Lord here seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in Matthew 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in Matthew 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards. Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

10:12 *And if she herself shall send away her husband and marry another, she commits adultery-* The Rabbis in the Lord's time were split into two schools on the question of divorce. One school taught that divorce was available for any reason, whilst the other said that it was only for sexual impurity. The question was put to Jesus as to when He thought divorce was possible. It seemed that He was going to be forced to take sides with one of the two contemporary attitudes. But He cut clean through the whole thinking of first century Israel by basing his argument on the principles of Eden: God created man and woman, and joined them together; therefore, He reasoned, the ideal standard is that there should be no divorce for any reason, including adultery. This is typical of His

teaching; through radical and fundamental recourse to the Old Testament, His teachings cut right through all the conceptions and expectations which were present in the mind of first century Jewry as a result of their cultural conditioning. We too must cut through the cultural conditioning of our era. In the time of Jesus, Roman law allowed women to divorce their husbands; some of the women of Herod's family got divorces like this. The Lord was aware of this, and commented upon this local social attitude, roundly condemning it: "If a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she commits adultery". If the Lord was so unafraid to challenge local cultural attitudes towards women, why should we think that He merely went along with those local contemporary attitudes?

10:13 *And they were bringing to him little children-* This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in Matthew 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are "brought" to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being "brought" to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

*That he should touch them-* The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the disciples to 'receive' the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord's further comment that "whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

*And the disciples rebuked them-* This is such a theme, of the disciples barring those who wanted to come to the Lord. We think of the Syro-Phoenician woman and other children, and the "little ones" of John's disciples. Such attitudes provoke the Lord's anger with us (:14). And they were doing this yet again despite the Lord's sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God's Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

10:14 *But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said to*

*them: Permit the little children to come to me; forbid them not. For to such belongs the kingdom of God-*

The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: "Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it". This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew (18:3). The Greek for "receive" is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn't receive it as a child. We didn't accept that we are the 'little ones', accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

The value of persons felt by the Lord is made very obvious when we notice His attention to women, children, Gentiles and the mentally ill /

deformed. These three groups often occur together in the Rabbis' teaching. The very people who were not counted as persons, the Lord went out of His way to express value for. And in this He sets us an example. Children were counted as of little value- but the Lord spoke about salvation for children (Mk. 10:14), and of the need to become like a child if we are to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 18:3). This purposeful recognition of the value of *all* human persons was a radical and difficult thing in His surrounding culture. And so it can be in ours too.

10:15 *Truly I say to you, whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it-* The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used in Mt. 19:12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

10:16 *And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them-* His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (Mt. 9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

10:17 *And as he was proceeding along the road, a man ran to him and kneeled before him, and asked him: Good Teacher, what shall I do-* This young man (Mt. 19:20) was a "ruler" (Lk. 18:18). To come to Jesus in a public place ["in the way"] and running- when rulers were supposed to never run in public but maintain decorum- all positively indicates a genuine belief in Jesus. Kneeling before Him was also a public sign of acceptance of Jesus as Lord. But he failed as so many do with respect to his wealth. He was a yuppie, a high flier, a rich young man who was also a "ruler". And he wasn't going to give that up; his 'sincerity' is shown by his sadness [RV "his countenance fell"] and his going away "grieved"

(:22). This walking away is an anti-climax, not the expected outcome of all the devotion displayed. But the account is structured in this unexpected way to highlight the extraordinary significance of a person's attitude to wealth, and how this can make all their other devotion meaningless.

The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed (Mt. "good thing") could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven". This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]... let him... do good" (same Greek words).

*That I may inherit eternal life?*- But Jesus had taught that the Kingdom of God on earth would be 'inherited' by the poor and meek (Mt. 5:5). If the man had thought that one through, he would've known the answer ahead of time. If he was rich and young, the chances are he had inherited his wealth- and he wanted to know how he could inherit eternity as well. He likely figured that money can buy everything- and in a strange way, the Lord was saying that the giving of wealth and inheriting eternity *are* in fact related, although actually ultimate 'goodness' and acceptance with God can't come from any such work of obedience.

"Inherit" eternal life suggests he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have* eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all... what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have

been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

10:18 *And Jesus said to him: Why do you call me good? None is good save one- God-* The extent to which this man from Nazareth, who sneezed and slept and thirsted as we do, was really God manifest in the flesh... this needs sustained personal meditation. That from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew really came forth the words of Almighty God; to the extent that it had to be said that never man spake like this man; and He Himself could assure us that heaven and earth would pass, but not His words (note the links with Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12)... that this man died for us... rose again, ascended... and now works His saving work for us, hour by hour. Mark records how a man once in an offhand way addressed the Lord Jesus as "good master". The Lord's response was to say that if the man *really* accepted Him as 'good' he ought to share His cross, and sell what he had and give to the poor. The real extent of Jesus' goodness will move us to deep personal response, if we truly perceive it. 10:20 "From my youth"- but he was a "young man" (Mt. 19:20). Note the Lord's grace- instead of being turned away by the man's youthful arrogance, instead the Lord perceives the positive in him and loves him for it (:21). See on Mk. 10:40.

The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question 'why do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false



doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

10:19 *You know the commandments-* The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

*Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honour your father and mother-* Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

10:20 *And he said to him: Teacher, all these things have I observed from my youth-* The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man's self-righteousness: "The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up" (Mt.). He was young- and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection?'

Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'

10:21 *And Jesus observing him, loved him; and said to him: One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. And come [AV: "take up the cross and"] follow me-* "You lack" is s.w. to be destitute of. In response to the man's question "What do I still lack?" (Mt. 19:20). He lacked nothing materially, but therefore he lacked the important thing- treasure in Heaven. The word play involving 'lacking' suggests that spiritual wealth and material wealth are opposites; likewise to give away treasure on earth is to as it were transfer it to Heaven. All this underscores the point that we can't have both. All our material wealth is to be given away in order to get spiritual treasure (Mt. 13:44). "What you lack" is parallel to the phrase Mt. 19:21 records: "If you will be perfect / complete". The man could still have had a relationship with the Lord if he hadn't sold all; but he wanted perfection and went away from Jesus because he couldn't face up to the fact that he wasn't perfect, would be saved by grace and now by his own obedience. And so many 'perfectionists' have done likewise. It's perhaps because of the man's tendency to perfectionism that the Lord prefaced His answer to the question by saying that even He wasn't completely "good" as God alone is "good" (10:18). The humanity of Jesus is therefore, in a way, an answer to 'perfectionism'. Not that there is ultimately any such thing as 'perfectionism', for it cannot be in man to be perfect. Perfectionism is merely an arrogant illusion. The record in Mt. 19:16,17 brings this out clearer- "*Good Master, what good thing shall I do... why do you call me "good"?*" There is none "*good*" but one, that is, God". The man thought that by his "good" deeds he could become as "good" as God, the only "good" One. And He walked away from Jesus because he was unable to accept that this is not in fact the case, and that even Jesus Himself stood as 'not good' compared to God; He stood 'perfect' with God by reason of the relationship He had with God, not solely on the basis of His good works. However, even total generosity and giving away of wealth will not bring total completeness. 'You lack one thing' appears to be an allusion to Ps. 23:1 LXX: "The Lord is my shepherd; not one thing is lacking to me". To take up the cross and follow the Lord Jesus as our shepherd, with the loss of material wealth this implies, is the essence of lacking nothing. For walking with Him is perfection, completeness, our everything.

The very fact that we want to rise up to the heights commends us to God. When the rich young man, in his zeal for righteousness, claimed: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth", the Lord didn't rebuke him for self-righteousness; instead, He beheld Him (with His head cocked to one side?), He took a long wistful look at Him, and *loved him* (Mk. 10:21). The Lord had a wave of warmth come over Him for that arrogant young man, simply because He appreciated the evident spiritual ambition which

was within him. It was for this reason that the Father so loved the Son. God caused the Lord Jesus to approach unto Him; "for who would dare of himself to approach unto me?" (Jer. 30:21 RSV). The Father confirmed the Son in His spiritual ambition, recognizing that very few men would rise up to the honour of truly approaching unto God.

The "one thing" lacking was to distribute his wealth, and to follow the crucified Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on Mt. 19:16 *What good thing*. The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (Mt. 25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

The rich young man would fain have followed Jesus. But he was told that he must sell all that he had, give to the poor, and take up the cross to follow Christ (Mk. 10:21). Notice how the ideas of following Christ and taking up the cross are linked. The man went away, unable to carry that cross, that sacrifice of those material things that were dearest to him.

Peter responds with the strong implication that he *had* done all these things, he was following the Master, and by implication he felt he was carrying the cross. Notice the parallels between the Lord's demand of the young man, and Peter's comment (Lk. 18:22 cp. 28; Mk. 10:21 cp. 28):

	"We have left all
"Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor	
...and come, take up the cross	[no comment by Peter]
and follow me"	...and have followed you"

Peter seems to have subconsciously bypassed the thing about taking up the cross. But he was sure that he was really following the Lord. He blinded himself to the inevitable link between following Christ and self-crucifixion; for the path of the man Jesus lead to Golgotha. We have this same tendency, in that we can break bread week after week, read the records of the crucifixion at several times / year, and yet not let ourselves grasp the most basic message: that we as followers of this man must likewise follow in our self-sacrifice to that same end.

"Take up *the* cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him- He speaks of "*the* cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between *our* taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. Of course we cannot literally take up the Lord's cross. Taking up the cross must therefore refer to an attitude of mind; it is paralleled with forsaking all that we have (Lk. 14:27,33), which is surely a command to be obeyed in our *attitudes*. "Take up" is translated 'take on' when we read of 'taking on' the yoke of Christ, i.e. learning of Him (Mt. 11:29). To take up the Lord's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Consider the contexts in which the Lord spoke of taking up His cross:

(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!

(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, Christ spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.

(3) The command to take up the cross in Matt. 10:38 is in the context of Christ's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but Christ asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow Christ- but only insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with the Lord. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ. Israel were an empty vine, without fruit in God's eyes- because the spiritual fruit they appeared to bring forth was in fact fruit to themselves (Hos. 10:1).

10:22 *But this teaching saddened him, and he went away sorrowful-* Walking away from Jesus in sorrow is a picture from the scenes of the final judgment. In this case, the man rejected himself, he chose to walk away- just because he couldn't accept that he wasn't perfect. Literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

"He went away" is significant because the entire section starting from Mt. 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he

could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt. 19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt. 19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven". This is the same idea as in Mt. 18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

*For he was one that had great possessions-* Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

10:23 *And Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples: How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*- "Have wealth" is paralleled, or expanded, in 10:24, with "them that trust in riches". To have wealth is to trust in it. Hence the danger of it- wealth militates against faith. Hence Paul warned "them that are rich in this world that they... *trust not* in uncertain riches but in the living God" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (Mt. 19:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

10:24 *And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus continued and said to them: Children! How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*- The disciples were so immature that they thought wealth was a sign of Divine blessing. And were astonished to hear that it's really hard for wealthy people to be saved. Hence, in loving pity at their immaturity, the Lord addresses them as "Children...". See on Lk. 18:24.

10:25 *It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich*

*man to enter into the kingdom of God-* I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expository gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

The camel must shed its load of riches and goods, so that it can pass through the gate into the Kingdom. But we are doing that right now! We will pass through the gate into the Kingdom when the Lord returns (Rev. 22:14), and yet through shedding our materialism, we do it now. John puts it more bluntly and yet more absolutely: now, through the life of faith, we have the eternal life, in that we begin to live now the type of life which we will eternally live. We receive the Kingdom of God here and now, in that we receive the Gospel of the Kingdom; and if we accept it as a little child, we begin to enter it, now- in that the lives we live determine whether or not we will enter it at the Lord's coming. We are on our way into life! We have received the Kingdom, our names were written from the foundation of the world, and only our falling from grace can take that away. This is almost too good news to believe.

*10:26 And they were astonished exceedingly, saying to him: Then who can be saved?-*

They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

"Who *can* be saved?" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit

their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in Mt. 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

10:27 *Jesus, observing them, said-* The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

*With men it is impossible, but not with God-* The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

*For all things are possible with God-* Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained to, then God will still accept us.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. Here the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible"- without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that You can do everything". It may be that Jesus is



even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too Mt. 5:27-30.

Having said that it is so hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom- as hard as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle- the Lord comments that 'what is impossible with man, is possible with God' (Mk. 10:27). In first century Palestinian Judaism, this saying was a kind of figure of speech for describing a miracle. If any rich person gets into the Kingdom- it will be a miracle. That's what the Lord is saying. And He says it to us today. Generosity alone, of course, won't bring us into the Kingdom. It's not as if we can buy our way in. But there are major implications that our attitude to wealth is in fact a crucial indicator of whether or not we will be there.

Having explained "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom", the Lord went on to comment: "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mk. 10:25,27). It is impossible for a rich man to be saved, He seems to be saying. And as we seek to convert the rich and self-satisfied in the societies in which we live, this does indeed seem the case. But although on one hand it *is* an impossibility, yet not with God: for He desires to seek and save the rich too. And indeed He does, achieving what with men is impossible. And the Father seeks to impress His positive attitude upon us.

10:28 *Peter began to say to him: We have left all-* The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel here says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material here is strongly related to that in Mt. 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in Mt. 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a

wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

Was Peter really correct to say that he had really "left all"? He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's..." (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he was a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack (Mt. 17:27). The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

*And have followed You-* Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; purely for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshiping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves,

to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you: You who have followed me-* This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn't then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn't in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of "twelve". Judas didn't follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: "You who will have followed me...". Or is that He spoke of "the twelve" as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was 'going before him' to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

10:29 *Jesus said: Truly I say to you. Whoever leaves house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands for my sake and for the gospel's sake-* This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their

dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29). The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

10:30 *Will receive in return, in this present season, a hundredfold houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, and with them persecutions; but in the age to come, eternal life-* The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfilment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfilment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus. And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ (Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others...

"Inherit eternal life" are the very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to

inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

10:31 *But many that are first shall be last and the last, first-* The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who *don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom.

10:32 *And they were on the road heading up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was walking ahead of them-* This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. They were going "up" from Jericho, Mt. 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather

than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

*And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve aside-* The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

*He began to tell them what was to happen to him-* Tragically He so often sought to explain to the disciples about the cross; and yet always they met His efforts either with silence, or with irrelevant changing of the subject, or even protest, in Peter's case. The tragic mismatch between the Lord's cross and the mind of the disciples is brought out in Mk. 10:32-40. Having set His face to go up to Jerusalem, the Lord "went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid". The words imply that He took the lead and walked forcefully a few paces ahead of them in a startling manner. "If anything in the Gospels has the stamp of real and live recollection upon it, it is this". His mind was evidently dwelling in His forthcoming death, in which He may well have foreseen that He would be crucified with sinners on His right and left. But then two of the disciples respond to His prediction of the cross by asking that *they* should sit on His right and left hand in glory over the others. Here we see, on the Gospel writers own admission, the paucity of their effort to grasp the real message of the cross. May it not be so with us. May we at least strive to enter into His struggle, and be moved to a true and unpretended humility by it.

There was something in His body language during His last journey to Jerusalem which was nothing short of terrifying to the disciples: "They were amazed; and as they followed Him, they were afraid" (Mk. 10:32-34). All this came to a climax in His extreme sweating in Gethsemane as the great horror of darkness began to actually descend on Him (Mk. 14:33-42). Contrast this with the calmness of suicide bombers or other religiously persuaded zealots going to their death. The Lord- *our* Lord- was too sensitive to humanity, to *us*, to His *own* humanity, to His own sense of the possibility of failure which His humility pressed ever upon Him... than to be like that. See on Heb. 5:7,8.

10:33 *We will go up to Jerusalem-* This was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too. Or perhaps we are to conclude that like Abraham, they were following their Lord not knowing where they were going.

*And the Son of Man shall be delivered-* The Greek means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His

sufferings- the hand over from God's Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

*To the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death-* Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

*And shall deliver him to the Gentiles-* The Lord foresaw that the Jews would have to deliver Him to the Romans if their death sentence was going to be legally inflicted.

10:34 *And they shall mock him and shall spit upon him and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again-* The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament. And yet the Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him; He as the master psychologist and chess player knew the moves which His chosen actions would elicit, and that may have been why He could predict these particular events in such detail.

10:35 *And there came near to him James and John, the sons of Zebedee, saying to him: Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we shall ask of you-* So often, the Lord's predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord's death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does our attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

Matthew places these words on the lips of their mother, Salome. But effectively the words were those of James and John. Divine inspiration reflects how God understood that completely. They tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is

unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that you should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in Mt. 18:19 about the successful prayer of "two... who should agree as touching anything they should ask". But of course the Lord's context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord's words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs to be analysed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

10:36 *And he said to them: What would you wish that I should do for you?*- Matthew has: "What do you desire...". These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in Mt. 20:32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w.- Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to



verbalize and thus define their deepest desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm, and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the disciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you - what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

He had just been speaking of how He would die for them. James and John evidently didn't appreciate the wonder, the blessing, the honour of the fact that the Son of God would love them unto the end. All they wanted was the human blessing, in this life, of being able to tell their brethren that they would be *the* greatest in the Kingdom. "What would ye that I should do for you" - in addition to loving you unto the death, of loving you with a love greater than that of *anyone* else? Their minds were all too set on the present, the petty glory of here and now. But when they actually beheld the cross (Lk. 23:49 suggests James also did), they would have learnt their lesson. And so it was with Job. Throughout the core of the book, he consistently addresses God as 'Shaddai', the fruitful one, the provider of blessing. But in the prologue and epilogue, he calls God 'Yahweh'. It may be that He came to *know* the wonder of God's Name to the extent that he quit his perception of God as only the provider of material blessing.

10:37 *And they said to him: Grant to us that we may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left hand, in your glory-* This confirms that she had Mt. 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory". The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting others to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

When the Lord Jesus promised those who overcome that they would sit down with Him in His throne (Rev. 3:21), He was surely casting a glance back at the way His men had asked to sit at His right and left hand, in His

glory (Mk. 10:37). He knew He was promising a future glory far above what to them must have been the heights of their spiritual ambition.

They surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

*10:38 But Jesus said to them: You do not know what you ask-* The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?-* The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

*Or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?-* Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I [shall] drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and

yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- we *are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom. 6:3 that we *were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense] baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

In Gethsemane He spoke of drinking the cup of His final death and suffering. But earlier He had spoken in the present tense: "the cup that I drink of... the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mk. 10:38). The drinking of the cup of death was ongoing. Likewise there are several verses in Psalms 22 and 69 which are evidently relevant to both the Lord's life and also His final hours on the cross. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" is in the context of the cross, but is applied to an earlier period of the Lord's life (Ps. 69:9 cp. Jn. 2:17). "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children" is another example (Ps. 69:8); it is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet it is elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. James and John pestered the Lord to give them glory in His Kingdom. He didn't refuse their request; He simply turned the question round to them: 'Can you really carry my cross? Don't be so obsessed with getting salvation out of me. Concentrate instead on carrying my cross, being baptized with my baptism, and then the corollary of that- sharing my resurrection- will follow in its own time'.

10:39- see on Gal. 3:27.

*And they said to him: We are able! And Jesus said to them: The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized-*

The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had

just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

Seeing even the Lord balked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, saying that they would drink His cup is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance

of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blasé spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

*10:40 But to sit on my right hand or on my left hand-* When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

*Is not mine to give-* A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

*But it will be given to them for whom it has been prepared-*

A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet *we* are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lives the the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves.

It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

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

The altogether lovely manner of the Lord is shown in how He dealt with immature understanding and ambition amongst others. James and John wanted to sit on either side of the Lord in His Kingdom glory. Instead of telling them to be more humble, the Lord gently went along with them- so far. He said that this great honour would be given to "them for whom it is prepared" (Mk. 10:40). And whom is this? *All* those redeemed in Christ have that place "prepared" (Mt. 25:34). The immediate context speaks of the cross (Mk. 10:33,45), and it is this which prepared the places in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:1,2). Thus the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, and the Kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). Actually, all those redeemed in Christ will sit down with Him in His very throne- not just on the right and left side of Him (Rev. 3:21). Indeed, the Lord's subsequent parable about the places prepared in the Kingdom, and people being on the right *and left* hand of Him at judgment, with the rejected on the left hand, was perhaps His gentle corrective to James and John. But my point is that He was so gentle about the way He corrected their error. Actually twice before in Mark 10, the Lord had shown this spirit. The arrogant young man told Him that he'd kept all the commandments from his youth [and, get it, he was only a young guy anyway...]. And yet "Jesus beholding him, loved him" (Mk. 10:20). And then moments later in the record, Peter starts on about "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee"- and the Lord so gently doesn't

disagree, even though Peter's fishing business and family were still there for him to return to it seems, but promises reward for all who truly do leave all (Mk. 10:28-30). So just three times in one chapter, we see the gentle patience of the Lord with arrogant, small minded people, who thought they understood so much and were so righteous. They were nothing compared to Him. But the way He deals with them is indeed "altogether lovely".

*10:41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John-* This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:42). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

*10:42 And Jesus called them to him, and said to them: You know-* This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them.

*That they who are considered rulers of the Gentiles-* The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

*Lord it over them-* Gk. *katakuriuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather

than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is full of words containing the compounds *kata-* and *arch-*, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun-* prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte*, *synodos*, *koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

*And their great ones-* The *megas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

*Exercise authority over them-* They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

10:43 *But it is not to be so among you; but whoever would become great among you-* This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and



total *exousia* (see on Mt. 20:25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

When the disciples argued about who should be the greatest, the Lord replied in the present tense that "it *is* not so among you: whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister" (Mk. 10:43 R. V.). He expected them to live up to the righteousness which He imputed to them.

*Shall be your servant*- The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministration to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they.

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this,

Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

10:44 *And whoever would be first among you-* The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even*

as the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

*Shall be servant of all*- Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

See on Phil. 2:7. It is a great NT theme that we are the bond slaves of the Lord Jesus. And yet we are also to be slaves to all His people (Mk. 10:44), for the Lord Jesus *is* His people: they are His body. To serve our brethren is to serve the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus *expects* us to relate to Him as bond slaves. He speaks of how a bond slave can be working in the field all day, come home tired, and then be immediately commanded by the master to prepare his meal and only then get his own meal- and the master won't thank him, but just expects it of him. And the Lord Jesus applies this to His relationship with us. The Lord of all grace is, by absolute rights, a demanding Lord. He commented that we call Him Lord and Master, and we say well, for so He is (Jn. 13:13). If we are truly the bond-slaves of the Lord Jesus, we have no 'free time' for ourselves. Neither will we expect to have time for ultimately our 'own thing'. The craze for personal and social freedom which sweeps the modern world will leave us untouched. Ultimate freedom and total independence is not for us.

10:45 *For the Son of Man came*- If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that this is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

*Not to be served by others*- Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (Mt. 25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

*But to serve*- The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man came", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

*And to give his life as a ransom for many*- The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order. And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self

control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

In all ways, the Lord is our pattern. He was a servant of all, and so should we be. His servanthood dominated His consciousness. He said that He came not [so much as] to be ministered unto, but so as to minister, with the end that He gave His life for others (Mk. 10:45). In His death for Israel, He was "a minister [lowly servant] of the circumcision", i.e. the Jews (Rom. 15:8). Yet we *are* His ministers, His slave / servants. The same word is used for how the women and Angels ministered unto Him (Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41), and how He anticipated men would minister to Him (Jn. 12:26 Gk. cp. 2 Cor. 11:23; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). But both then and now, He came and has come in order to minister / serve us, rather than to be served by us; even though this is what we give our lives to doing. Yet He is still all taken up with ministering to us. He came more to serve than to be served. We are slaves, all of us, of the lowest sort. It's hard for us to realise the lowliness of being a Roman slave; and the sheer wonder of being made a free man, purely by grace. This is what *each and every one of us* has experienced. Servanthood / slavery should be the concept that dominates our lives; for we cannot be a servant of two masters (Mt. 6:24). We are to be wholly dedicated to the service of the Lord Jesus and those in Him. See on Lk. 17:10.

10:46 *And they arrived in Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho-* Matthew's account of the healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is

that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analysed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

*With his disciples and a great crowd-* The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (Mt. 20:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

*Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside-* Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way".

10:47 *And when he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, and say: Jesus! You Son of David, have mercy on me!*- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of Mt. 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same

connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no

Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

10:48 *And many rebuked him-* This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

*Saying that he should hold his peace. But he cried out more zealously: You, Son of David, have mercy on me!-* This could be seen as the result of the Lord's piquing their sense of urgency for Christ by not responding immediately. This is also a factor in some of His delayed responses to our own needs.

10:49 *And Jesus stood still and said: Call him. And they called to the blind man, saying to him: Be of good courage! Rise, he calls for you!-* The Lord could have walked up to the man as He did to others when curing them. But on this occasion He wished to teach that His calling of men to Him for healing often uses a human mechanism. The "call" comes through people. Through us. Their obedience to the command to go call the man is emphasized. The Lord "calls" just as the people "called" the man. The Lord's calling and our calling of men are thereby paralleled. The experience of being called by the Lord is not to be seen as an onerous call to responsibility before Him; rather is it the source of "courage". His calling is because He wants to do something good for us, rather than saddle us with the weight of responsibility to judgment.

10:50 *And he, casting away his garment, sprang up and came to Jesus-* His garment was likely all he owned. And he is therefore presented as being willing to forsake all in response to the call of Jesus, just as the disciples immediately forsake all and followed Him. 'Coming to Jesus' is the phrase just used of how the little children came to Him (10:14); and



again, there was a desire to forbid them. This native tendency we have to forbid others to come to the Lord must be watched carefully; and never allowed to be given formal expression in church policies which exclude some from ever coming to the Lord Jesus.

10:51 *And Jesus said: What will you have me do for you? And the blind man said to him: Rabbi- that I may receive my sight-* The Lord had a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

The one thing he wanted was to see. The healed blind man is a type of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" (Prov. 4:7). This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

10:52 *And Jesus said to him: Go your way. Your faith has made you whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed him in the way-* He "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go your way". The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here, for *akoloutheo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'. The Lord told the man to go *his* way, but the man followed Jesus in *His* way, the way which has

been defined in Mt. 20:17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.

# MARK CHAPTER 11

11:1- see on Mk. 7:32-35.

*And when they drew near to Jerusalem-* This might suggest that the gospel author was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

*To Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives-* 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig tree. Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

*He sent two of his disciples-* The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

11:2 *Instructing them: Go into the village in front of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat.*

*Untie it and bring it here-* The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this

was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required, according to Matthew. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

11:3 *And if anyone says to you: Why are you doing this? You are to say: The Lord has need of him; and immediately he will send him back here-* God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be. "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining

these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

11:4 *And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it-* Gk. "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

11:5 *And those that stood there said to them: What are you doing, untying the colt?-* This may have been part of a pre-arranged plan by the Lord. If indeed as suggested on :4 this was Herod's palace and colt, we can understand why the Lord wished to shield the participants in the plan. Perhaps He was seeking to irritate Herod by appearing to have stolen his colt, and appearing to usurp Herod's authority by entering Jerusalem upon it. For He gave His life, of His own device, so that He died at the time and place He did, and by crucifixion. His life was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18), nor was He overtaken by events; He was the master of the scene.

11:6 *And they said to them just as Jesus had said, and they let them go-* See on :5. For them to respond so immediately is unusual and unrealistic until we perceive that this was all part of a prearranged plan.

11:7 *And they brought the colt to Jesus, and put on it their garments; and he sat upon it-* Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled (according to Matthew) was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his

message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

*11:8 And many spread their garments upon the road, and others spread branches which they had cut from the fields-*

Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*, "The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

*11:9 And they that went ahead and they that followed, cried, Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!-*

Hosanna means 'Save now'. This obsession with 'Salvation now' was their equivalent of today's prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord.

Matthew records here that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

"He that comes" was a clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

11:10 *Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*- They liked to believe that the Messianic Kingdom was now coming. But the Lord's parables and teaching about the Kingdom had repeatedly emphasized that the full establishment of that Kingdom was some way off, and the message of the Kingdom was to be lived in our attitudes whilst this secular life continues. Hosanna "in the highest" suggests that because the people wanted 'Save *now*' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which led to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

11:11 *And he entered into Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked at everything, it being now evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it. Going to Bethany continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany' as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publicly explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death,



however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

11:12 *And the next day, when they left Bethany, he felt hungry-* Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

11:13 *And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves-* for it was not the season for figs- God is in search of man, and so is His Son. We surely all at times get depressed, feeling we are nothing and nobody, just used rather than needed. But just as we have our need to be needed, so does God, seeing we are made in His image and likeness. We see it all worked out visually when the Lord Jesus was starving hungry (Gk.), and saw a fig tree far away. He walked towards it, fixing His mind upon the tree. It wasn't the time for figs, but the tree had leaves, and He was so hungry, He'd have been prepared to eat the most immature, unripe figs (Mk. 11:12,13). This is an acted parable, of His search for man, for fruit upon us. The same imagery of a fig tree bearing fruit is used by the Lord in Lk. 13:6 to speak of His hope of spiritual fruit from Israel. But when the Lord finally arrived at the leafy fig tree, He found no fruit at all, and so He cursed it, and it withered. The same word is used about the withering of those rejected at the last day by the Lord Jesus- they will be withered, and then gathered up and burnt (Jn. 15:6). So as the Lord Jesus strode the long way towards the fig tree, focused upon it with all the focus and hope of a hungry man, so eager and hopeful to find fruit... so He is striding towards us with the same hope in us, of finding at least something, however immature, however unripe. But at least something. The shortening of the days for the sake of a remnant is predicted in Is. 65:8,9: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed [Jesus] out of Jacob... and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there". The "elect" are paralleled with "my servants". Because of them, the minority of faithful fruit, the whole tree is not destroyed. This is exactly the image of the fig tree parable; because of the beginnings of

spiritual fruit on the tree of Israel, the whole nation will not be cut off and they will be saved by the coming of the Kingdom.

The fig tree was symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord. His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down. "Leaves only" recalls the inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

11:14 *Jesus addressed it: Henceforth, no one will eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it-* Mk. 11:14,21,22 imply that Peter was amazed that something the Lord had predicted about the fig tree had actually come true.

Sometimes God speaks as if He has rejected Israel, and other times as if they will eternally be His people. Such is the extent of His passionate feelings for them. And the Son of God entered into this- He said that no man would eat fruit of the tree of Israel for ever (Mk. 11:14), when in fact Israel one day will fill the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). We too, in the spirit of the prophets, are to enter into these feelings of God. God's threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don't somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. He cries out through Hosea of how His many 'repentings' are "kindled together" as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened (Hos. 11:8). The fig tree would never bear fruit (Mk. 11:14). But Israel will blossom and bud and fill the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6); hence the fig tree bearing fruit when it has been condemned never to bear fruit is such a dramatic sign (Lk. 21:29,30.). The Lord spoke His words about Israel's future budding with full knowledge that He (and several OT passages) had condemned her to eternal barrenness. He knew, however, the paradox of grace.

If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the

fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

Matthew says there would be no fruit from the fig tree "For ever", for the *aión*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

*11:15 And they came to Jerusalem, and he entered into the temple and began to throw out those that sold and those that bought in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money exchangers and the seats of those that sold the doves-*

This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

Throwing out or [Mt.] 'casting out' is a verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (Mt. 8:12 and soon after this incident, in Mt. 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them

with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

Those who sold and bought in the temple refers to Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

The overthrowing of the tables was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

The traders were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anti-climax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest. Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind.

11:16 *And he would not permit anyone to carry any merchandise through the temple-* Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of

them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do. For all their claims that God's temple was holy, they were treating it like a public street by allowing porters to carry their goods through it rather than around it. It could be that the Jews permitted the carrying of goods through the court of the Gentiles, but not elsewhere. It's as if the Lord is saying that that court was to be treated as being as holy as the rest of the structure.

*11:17 And he taught and said to them-* The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

*Is it not written-* The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions. Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

*My house shall be called-* Luke uses the present tense, "*is* called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

*A house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!-* The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the

traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to be seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry (Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

Some of the Bible's 'prophecies' are command more than prediction. The Lord Jesus criticized the Jews for trading in the temple because "Is it not written, My house *shall be* called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mk. 11:17). We can easily read this as meaning that one day, a 'house of prayer for all nations' was to be built in Jerusalem. But in that case, why should not the Jews trade in the temple there and then, well before this was to happen, say, 2000 years later? The Lord surely means that the prophecy that the temple "shall be called..." a house of *prayer* was a command more than a prediction. It "shall be" a place for *prayer* and not *trading*. The 'fulfilment' of this statement was dependent upon them praying there and encouraging all nations to pray there; yet they could limit the fulfilment of the 'prophecy' by stopping Gentiles praying there, and by discouraging prayer there because of their trading policies. Thus the Lord saw the prophecy as more of a command than mere prediction. 'Prophecy' really means the speaking forth of God's word, rather than the foretelling of the future. The closer one looks, the more conditional prophecies and Divine statements there are. "My house shall be called a house of prayer" had the extent of its possible fulfilment limited by the Jews turning the temple into a trading centre (Mk. 11:17).

11:18 *And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought a way to destroy him. For they feared him, for all the crowd were astonished at his teaching-* Despite all this, they would very soon be screaming for His

blood. Their increased passion to destroy the Lord was, I suggest, exactly the response He had intended to elicit by parodying a triumphal entry.

11:19 *And every evening he left the city-* His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it. He repeatedly did so to try to get the perceptive minority to realize what was really happening.

11:20 *And as they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away from the roots-* This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

This incident of the withered fig tree is an example of where Jesus didn't want us to perceive Him as too different from us. The disciples are amazed at the faith of Jesus in God's power. He had commanded the fig tree to be withered- but this had required Him to pray to God to make this happen. As the disciples looked at Him, wide eyed with amazement at His faith, very much into the "Wow!" experience, the Lord immediately urged *them* to "have faith in God... *whosoever* [and this was surely His emphasis] shall [ask a mountain to move in faith, it will happen]... therefore I say unto *you*, Whatsoever things *you* desire [just as Jesus had desired the withering of the fig tree], when *you* pray [as Jesus had done about the fig tree], believe that *you* receive them, and *you* shall have them". I suggest His emphasis was upon the word *you*. He so desired them to see His pattern of faith in prayer as a realistic image for them to copy. How sad He must be at the way He has been turned into an other-worldly figure, some wonderful, kindly God who saves us from the weakness and lack of faith which we are so full of. Yes, He *is* our Saviour, and the "Wow!" factor leads us to have a burning and undying sense of gratitude to Him. But He isn't *only* that; He is an inspiration. It is in this sense that the spirit of Christ can and does so radically transform human life in practice. Of course, we have sinned, and we continue to do so. For whatever reason, we are not Jesus. But our painful awareness of this [and it ought to be painful, not merely a theoretical acceptance that we are sinners]... shouldn't lead us to think that His example isn't a realistic pattern for us.

11:21 *And Peter, remembering, said to him: Rabbi, look at the fig tree which you cursed. It is withered away!*- See on Mk. 8:29; Jn. 21:7. After the denials, Peter again "remembered the word of the Lord". And it seems that Mark is Peter's gospel. This has the ring of truth to it, in that Peter is portrayed, for all his impetuosity, as one who meditated upon the Lord's words. Perhaps the Lord had in mind His parable of the seed which sprung

up and "withered" (Lk. 8:6 s.w.); Israel's initial response to John's preaching had withered. They were the withered branches which were now cast out of the tree (Jn. 15:6 s.w.). Peter is presenting himself as being somewhat foolish and unspiritual, in being surprised that the Lord's word had come true. He implies that he ought not to have been surprised at all.

11:22 *And Jesus answering said to them: Have faith in God-* We are asked to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48); to have the faith of God (Mk. 11:22 AVmg.). By faith in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we can attain these heights; but not in our own strength. In our every spiritual struggle and victory against the flesh throughout the day, we are playing out the finest and highest heroism that any playwright could conceive: the absolute underdog, the outsider without a chance, winning, at the end, the ultimate victory against impossible odds. Dear Peter exemplified how we so often behave, when he gasped at how deep was Jesus' faith, as he saw the fig tree withered in exact accord with the Lord's earlier words. But the Lord turns on Him immediately: "[*You*] have faith in God... *you* must believe, and whatever *you* ask in faith will happen, if you like me, see it as if it has happened at the point of asking for it".

11:23 *Truly I say to you, Whoever shall say to this mountain: Be removed and thrown into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart but shall believe that what he said will happen- he shall have it -* See on Rev. 8:8. It was the Lord's radical usage of language which led to the huge, seething anger which He provoked, culminating in the demand for His death. He seems to have purposefully reinterpreted and reapplied symbols and ideas which spoke of Jewish national pride, and applied them to something quite different. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on an ass, not a war horse, and in order to die... led to so much anger exactly because He had subverted such a familiar and longed for hope and symbol. We have to remember the huge value of symbols in the first century, living as we do in an age when the written word has become paramount. For the illiterate, symbols and acted parables were of far greater importance than the written word. We may think of 'Jesus' in terms of His teachings recorded at a specific chapter and verse of our Bibles. To the illiterate first century Jew, they thought of Him in terms of what He *did*- His cleansing of the temple, His image of the temple mount being plucked up and cast into the sea. The Lord's teaching about the temple was especially subversive- for the temple played a "decisive role... in resistance toward Rome". It was "the focal point of the hope of national liberation, and hence was regarded as a guarantee of security against the pagans". But what does Jesus teach about the temple? It will be destroyed, His body shall be greater than the temple, it was to be a place of blessing for pagan Gentiles, because of Israel's wickedness the abomination would be set there, every place was hallowed ground, He



was the true priest, etc. According to the *Mishnah Berakoth* 9.5, the faithful were to wash the dust from their feet before entering it- and Jesus washed His disciples feet in likely allusion to this before they say down in a private room and broke bread with Him (Jn. 13:1-20). As the Lithuanian Jewish Rabbi Jacob Neusner commented about Jesus' institution of the 'breaking of bread': "The holy place has shifted, now being formed by the circle made up of the master and his disciples". The Lord Jesus used the term "the blood of the covenant" at the last Supper, with reference to how Zech. 9:9-11 prophesied that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would be because of this "blood of my covenant". Yet the restoration / redemption which the Lord had in mind was not politically from Rome, but from sin and death through His blood. The temple had no great role in the Lord's teaching. By driving out traders from the temple, the Lord was effectively suggesting that the Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21, of how in the restoration there would be no Gentile traders there, was coming true in Him. And the elders of the Jews are thus paralleled by Him with the Gentiles. He speaks of how "this mountain"- and He must've been referring to Zion, the temple mount- was to be plucked up and cast into the sea of Gentiles (Mk. 11:23). And He was alluding to Zech. 4:6,7, which spoke of how the mountain of Babylon would be cast into the sea at the restoration- with the 'splash' expressed in the words "Grace, grace". This was to associate the Jewish temple system with Babylon- just as Revelation 17 likewise does. The Lord opened up a new universe of symbols; in an almost kaleidoscopic way, He twisted all the well loved symbols around. And when you mess with symbols, people get angry. Having lived in the Baltic States many years, I observed how inflammatory is the issue of messing with war memorials. Russians and Balts can slag each other off verbally all they wish, and people shrug. But mess with symbols, remove or rededicate a war memorial- and the crowds are on the streets. And this was, partially, what led to the fury with Jesus which led to His lynching. He who proclaimed non-violent revolution, the radical transformation of the inner mind into God's temple, Israel's true Messiah, was seen as the ultimate threat to all that it meant to be Jewish- all because His language and actions subverted the beloved symbols of the social club. When we experience this... we are sharing something of His sufferings.

There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles

represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Mark's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them - to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

"Cast into the sea" were the very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

The Lord's utter confidence in the power of prayer is reflected in the way He speaks to lepers, to waves of the sea, to blind eyes and deaf ears, commanding them to do things. Yet clearly this was a result of His own prayer to the Father. Yet He was so confident that what He had requested would really come true. And in Mk. 11:23 He challenges us to tell mountains to be removed. He doesn't tell us to ask God to move a mountain; rather does He teach us to talk directly to the mountain. It's been observed that Biblical Hebrew has no word for 'yes'; instead, in order to show agreement, the preceding words of the speaker are repeated. Examples are in Esther 5:7 Heb. and Gen. 18:15. Seeing that Biblical Hebrew reflects to us something of the mind of God, it seems to me that we're being taught by this to believe that what we ask for from God, we will receive; our request is the nature of the answer. Hence the need for care in formulating *what* we ask for, believing that God's 'yes' will be effectively a repeating back of our words to us.

Consider how the Lord taught ambition in prayer- He put before His men the real possibility of moving a mountain into the sea, if that was what was required (Mk. 11:23). This example wasn't off the top of His head; He was consciously alluding to Job 9:5, where Job says that God alone, but not man, can do something like moving a mountain into the sea. And the Lord is saying: 'Yes, God alone can do it; but such is the potential power of prayer, that He will hearken to your requests to do such things- and do them'. The whole process of Nazariteship was to encourage the normal Israelite to have the ambition to rise up to the spirit of the High Priest himself; the restrictions governing Nazariteship were a purposeful echo of those regarding the High Priest. The way God describes Himself as depriving Israel of "wine or strong drink" (Dt. 29:6) throughout the wilderness journey is Nazarite language: as if in all their weakness and profligacy, God still sought to inspire them to rise up to the heights.

The Christian must "believe that what he says comes to pass" - present tense. He is to visualize the immediate fulfilment of what he asks for in the court of Heaven. Compare the RV and AV of Ps. 92:11 in this connection: "Mine eye also shall see [RV 'hath seen'] my desire... and

mine ears shall hear [RV 'have heard'] my desire". The confusion in the tenses is surely intentional- David really felt he had already received that which he prayed for. He shows this again by the way in which he uses tense moods perhaps purposefully ambiguously in Ps. 56:13. The AV has: "Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling...?", whereas the RV renders it: "Hast thou not delivered my feet from falling?". Another example is in Ps. 18:44,47: "The strangers *shall* submit themselves... God [right now, by faith in prayer] subdueth the peoples". David perhaps perceived that the requests of prayer must also be some sort of statement that the prayer was answered already.

The Lord taught that we should believe that "what [we] say [in prayer] shall come to pass" (Mk. 11:23 RV). This is very much the language of God's word- what *He* says, comes to pass for sure. And so we're being invited to see *our* words in prayer as effectively like God's words; for if we pray according to His word, surely we will be heard. See on Jn. 15:7.

11:24 *Therefore I say to you: All things, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive them- and you shall have them-* This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.

The experience of answered prayer inspires us to pray yet more. "What things soever ye desire, believe that ye [did] receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk. 11:24 Gk.) can be read as meaning that we should remember how we received things in the past, and therefore we should have faith that the things we now desire really will be likewise granted. It is for this reason that the prayers recorded in the Psalms constantly look back to previous experiences of answered prayer as a motivation for faith and Hope: Ps. 3:4,5; 44:1-4; 61:5; 63:7; 66:18-20; 77:4-16; 86:13; 94:5,7-19; 116:1; 120:1,2; 126:1,4; 140:6,7. Jeremiah likewise (Lam. 3:55,56). And even the fact other believers had received answers to prayer inspired David's faith in prayer (Ps. 74:11-15; 106).

The close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfilment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit

'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

Even in His mortal life, the Lord was eager to as it were close the gap between Himself and His followers, so that they didn't feel He was an unattainable, distant icon to admire, but rather a true friend, leader, King and example to realistically follow. Thus when He cursed the fig tree, having prayed about it and firmly believing that what He had asked would surely come about, Peter marvelled: "Master, behold, the fig tree you cursed is withered!". The Lord replies by urging Peter to "Have faith in God. For truly I tell you, *whosoever* (and this is the stress, surely) shall say unto this mountain (far bigger than a fig tree) , Be removed be cast into the sea (a far greater miracle than withering a fig tree overnight), and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he says will come to pass (referring to how the words of Jesus to the fig tree were effectively His prayer to God about it); he shall *whatever* he says. Therefore I say unto *you*, Whatever *you* desire (just as I desired the withering of the fig tree), when *you* pray, believe that you receive them, and *you* shall have them (just as I did regarding the fig tree)" (Mk. 11:21-24). Peter's amazement at the power of the Lord's prayers was therefore turned back on him- '*You too* can do what I just did, and actually greater things are possible for you than what I just did'. That was the message here- and He repeated it in the upper room, in encouraging them that "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (Jn. 14:12).

11:25 *And whenever you stand praying, forgive those you have something against; so that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses-* The Lord assumed that whenever we pray, we will include a request for forgiveness. Not only is this one of the few requests in His model prayer, but Mk. 11:25 reflects the same assumption: "*Whensoever* ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one; that your Father... may forgive you" (RV). *Whenever* we pray we should be seeking forgiveness. And the Lord also implies that whenever we pray, we will almost always have something against someone else. For He knew well that human society is inevitably filled with misunderstandings and bad feelings against each other.

11:26 *But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses-* The conditions on which God's love and forgiveness operate was likewise stressed by Christ: "When ye stand praying, forgive... that your Father... may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk. 11:25,26). God's eagerness to forgive us is therefore reflected in His eagerness to see us forgive others. His desire to

make all grace abound towards us is something beautiful, something wondrous.

11:27 *And they arrived in Jerusalem. And as he was walking into the temple, there came to him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders-* Matthew notes he "entered" the temple. "Entered" is *erchomai*, and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

11:28 *They said to him: By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you authority to do these things?-* Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority? To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

11:29 *And Jesus said to them: I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things-* It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice. The sense of the Greek is not "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

11:30 *The baptism of John-* Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another

window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

*Was it from Heaven, or from men? Answer me-* Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

The 'naturalness' of Jesus becomes all the more powerful when we grasp Biblically that Jesus is our representative; exactly because He was really, genuinely human, He is such a natural and powerful imperative to us in our behaviour. Take, for example, His perception of His own baptism. Surely why He went through with it was to show His solidarity with us, who would later be baptized. He lined up along the banks along with big time sinners, nobodies, dear old grannies, weirdos, starry-eyed youngsters, village people stuck in the monotony of a hand-to-mouth existence, all of them standing there probably half-naked... and took His turn to be baptized. When asked later to account for His authority, Jesus asked whether His questioners accepted John's baptism as from Heaven or from men (Mk. 11:30). This wasn't merely a diversionary question; it was dead relevant. His authority was [partly] because He had been baptized by John. This was how much John's baptism inspired Him. It meant so much to Him, to have been thus identified with us. And it was that very identification with humanity, as the "son of Man", that gave Him His authority.

*11:31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying: If we shall say: From Heaven- he will say: Why then did you not believe him?-* This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :33 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

*11:32 But if we say: From men- they were in fear of the people. For all truly held John to be a prophet-* Although we would all agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God, it is quite possible that we fail to *feel* this as we might when we read it. The people "verily held John to be a prophet" (Mk. 11:32 RV) but they rejoiced only for a short time in the

light of his words. They rejected his most essential message- whilst still believing he was an inspired prophet. Or, thinking they believed he was.

*11:33 And they answered Jesus, saying: We do not know. And Jesus said to them: Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things- See on :31. They knew in their hearts the answer to both their question and the Lord's question. Their sin in having Him crucified was therefore the greater; for they recognized His Divine authority, and perceived that "This is the heir...". Likewise the Lord rarely stated that He was the Christ or God's Son; He left that to be worked out by inference from His words and works. And this is why God's revelation to us in His word the Bible is as it is. There is no set of 20 bullet points to be grasped, no statement of faith preserved. We are to work things out by inference, for thereby our personal conviction of them will be the more powerful and personal.*



# MARK CHAPTER 12

12:1 *And he began to speak to them in parables-* The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:

*"Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill [The environment was ideal]. He dug it up [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], gathered out its stones [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], planted it with the choicest vine ["the men of Judah"], built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], but, behold, a cry of distress".*

*A man planted a vineyard-* The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by

blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God's most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

*And set a hedge about it-* The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

*And dug a pit for the winepress-* This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness

(Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

*And built a tower-* It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit. And He likewise provides us with an optimal environment for spirituality, much as we are tempted to think He has it wrong on some points.

*And rented it to husbandmen. Then he went into another country-* Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God's entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile, country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particular careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth.

There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

12:2 *And at the season*- Matthew: "And when the harvest season drew near", a phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

*He sent*- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

*To the husbandmen a servant, so he might receive from the husbandmen the fruits of the vineyard*- The prophets are God's servants (2 Kings 9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord. But we wonder whether there was one initial prophet in view here? Matthew says there were two groups of servants, and this is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the "former prophets" and the "latter prophets".

12:3 *And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty handed*- Paul several times uses the word to express his fear that his preaching and pastoral labour had been "in vain" [s.w. "empty"], e.g. 1 Cor. 15:14. His aim, as our aim, was spiritual fruit in people, to see the fruits of the Spirit revealed in a convert. Where this is lacking we come away empty handed as it were, just like the Old Testament prophets. The parable

suggests that the more Israel were asked for spiritual fruit, the more angry and abusive they progressively became towards the servants who required that fruit from them. And so often, those who call others on their real spirituality are hated and finally destroyed by them.

*12:4 And again he sent to them another servant- and him they wounded in the head and handled shamefully-* When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head. "Handled shamefully" is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised". The Old Testament prophets suffered aspects of what the Lord suffered at their hands.

*12:5 And he sent another- and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some-* Matthew adds stoning to these insults. There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

*12:6 He had one other, a beloved son. He sent him last to them, saying: They will reverence my son-* It is noteworthy that the parable of Mk. 12:6 has Jesus describing Himself as both a servant- the last servant- and the only beloved son of the vineyard owner.

Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds "My beloved Son". Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son". The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem... judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants. We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

"Surely they will reverence my Son" is the thought imputed to Almighty God in the parable, as He sends His only Son to seek for spiritual response in Israel. The parable frames God as almost naive in believing that although Israel had killed the prophets, they would reverence the

Word made flesh, and the speaking of God to them in Him. Yet of course God knew what would happen; but in order to express the extraordinary, unenterable extent of His hopefulness, He is framed in this way. Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He was 'certain' that if His people went to Babylon in captivity, "surely then shalt you be ashamed... for all your wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But the reality was that they grew to like the soft life of Babylon and refused to obey the command to return to God's land. Such was and is the hopefulness of God. The Father had the same attitude to Israel in Old Testament times: "I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not" (Jer. 3:7 NIV). The Lord Jesus reflected the Father's positive spirit in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son to feature the Heavenly Father as running out to meet the returning son, falling on his neck and kissing him... in *exactly* the language of Gen. 33:4 about Esau doing this to Jacob. The connection can't be denied; but what was the Lord's point? Surely He was willing to see something positive in the otherwise fleshly Esau at that time, He as it were took a snapshot of Esau at that moment... and applied it to God Himself, in His extravagant grace towards an unworthy Jacob. This was how positive minded the Lord was in His reading of even the darkest characters.

12:7 *But those husbandmen said among themselves-* That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to "*When they shall see him, there is no beauty that they should desire him*" (Is. 53:2)

*This is the heir!*- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet,

it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*Come, let us kill him and the inheritance shall be ours-* Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab's actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel's repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

12:8 *And they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard-* Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order to Matthew: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn't have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they "took Him,

killed and cast out of the vineyard". The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

"Cast Him out" has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:10). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshiping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

12:9- see on Mk. 8:34-37.

*What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do?*- The Lord's parable of the vineyard is shot through with allusions to the vineyard parable of Is. 5. When the Lord asks "What will the lord of the vineyard do?", those who picked up the Isaiah 5 allusions would have found the answer in Is. 5:4,5: "What... to do... what I will do".

*He will come*- The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 21:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

*And destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard to others*- The Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy the husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least



impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

12:10 *Have you not read in the scripture-* They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*The stone which the builders rejected-* The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25). In the metaphor, the builders were supposed to use the stone, to manipulate it and use it as important material; and build a temple upon it. But they rejected the cornerstone, and so they didn't build a temple. That is what the metaphor implies. The Jews considered that the building of a temple was the work of Messiah; but they refused to build it, because they rejected Jesus as Christ. And so the Messianic Kingdom didn't come; there was no Messianic temple built by them, because they rejected the cornerstone.

*The same was made the head of the corner?-* If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

12:11 *This was from the Lord and it is marvellous in our eyes?-* In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our* eyes... *we* will rejoice and be glad... *we* have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

12:12 *And they sought to arrest him; but they feared the crowd. For they*

*perceived that he had spoken that parable against them; and they left him and went away-* The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple. Their "seeking" to arrest Him is the very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (Mt. 2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod. The Greek for "Lay hands on / arrest" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (Mt. 14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (Mt. 22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (Mt. 26:4,48,50,55,57). We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

*12:13 And they sent to him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, that they might catch him out in his teaching-* The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled or caught up in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9). As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny. The Pharisees and Herodians were sworn enemies. Herod was anathema to the Pharisees, who saw him as a false Jew and some kind of antiChrist figure. But a theme of the Lord's judgment and death was that His enemies were united together by a common hatred of Him.

*12:14 And when they arrived, they said to him: Teacher, we know you are truthful and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God-* See on Jn. 10:13. Lk. 20:21 adds that they also said at this point: "You say and teach *rightly*", Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire. John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpreted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

Not caring about others' opinion was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording the actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

*Is it lawful-* This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

*To give tribute to Caesar, or not?-* The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

*12:15 Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them: Why do you test me?-* Matthew has "their wickedness". The wickedness could be their hypocrisy, which the Lord goes on to comment upon. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their secret lives. In what were they hypocritical in this matter? Perhaps they quietly paid the tribute money? Or perhaps it was because in order to answer the question, the Lord made them bring the coin through the temple courts, thus breaking their own laws. They should've

been more concerned about the huge gap between their professions and their practice, rather than focusing upon finding error in another. And so it is to this day- fault finding in others over religious matters typically hides serious hypocrisy, the concern with personal sin is transferred into concern about others' sin. Our sense we ought to be self-examining is converted into an examination of others.

*Bring me a denarius, that I may look at it-* The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians brought it, not the Pharisees. In any case, we see yet another powerful evidence that the historical records of the Gospels are true to the very smallest detail.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

12:16 *And they brought it. And he said to them: Whose is this image and inscription? And they said to him: Caesar's-* He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him; and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His

signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

12:17 *And Jesus said to them: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled greatly at him-* The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. This would explain why the Lord says this after having accused them of being hypocrites, having perceived the sin they were involved with. Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

12:18 *And there came to him Sadducees (these say that there is no resurrection)-* The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. Lk. 20:27 says that they *antilego*, spoke against publicly, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore,

when they shall rise..." (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be taken to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

*And they asked him-* Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

12:19 *Teacher, Moses wrote to us-* The Lord picks this up in His answer in Mt. 22:31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

*If a man's brother dies and leaves a wife behind him and leaves no children, then his brother should take his wife and raise up seed to his*

*brother-* The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

12:20 *There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died leaving no seed-* This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

12:21 *And the second took her, and died leaving no seed behind him, and the third likewise-* As noted on :20, this was clearly not a true story.

12:22 *And the seven left no seed. Last of all the woman also died-* She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :20). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

12:23 *In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be? For the seven had her as wife-* The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

12:24 *Jesus said to them: Is not the reason you err that you do not know the scriptures, nor the power of God?*- Time and again the Lord assaults their pride in knowing the text of Scripture. "Have you *never* read" is commonly on His lips. We can read, and yet never really read; know, but never know. Familiarity with Bible phrases is simply not the same as understanding them correctly. The scriptures and God's power are paralleled, with every relevance for the Sadducees who denied the Old Testament's inspiration apart from the Torah. Likewise in their audience the Lord pointed out that David in the Psalms spoke "in Spirit" (Mt. 22:43)- the Psalms were inspired as much as the Torah.

12:25 *For when they shall rise from the dead*- Why does the Lord speak of the Kingdom of God as "the resurrection" (Mt.)? Perhaps it is to pave the way for His teaching that "all live unto Him", in the sense that here He is likewise raising the idea that time will have a different dimension then. The joy and freshness of resurrection will last eternally. The Kingdom will be as it were an eternal moment of resurrection, an eternal now, with no fading thrill but an "everlasting joy upon [our] heads" that will not fade and morph with familiarity and the passage of time.

*They neither marry, nor are given in marriage*- Note the present tenses. They are more striking in Lk. 20:36: "Neither *can* they die... they *are* equal unto the Angels: and *are* the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die... shall be equal... shall be...'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it. Lk. 20:37 says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham...". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you...", Jn. 6:32).

*But are as the angels in heaven*-

The Sadducees denied their existence (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of



Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

Lk. 20:36 adds that we shall be as "the children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry...". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

12:26 *But concerning the dead, that they are raised, have you not read in the book of Moses-* Of course they had, but the Lord is yet again making the point that we can read Scripture many times but not really read it as intended.

*In the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him-* Comparing with Matthew's record, surely the Lord said something like 'He spoke unto Moses, unto you, saying...'. What was spoken to Moses was spoken to them personally, just as the living word speaks to every generation. The Lord was equating each secular Jew with none less than Moses himself. This was unthinkable blasphemy in Judaistic thought, to see oneself as receiving God's words, having God reveal Himself directly to us, just as He did to Moses. God of course had wanted to reveal Himself like this to Israel, but they asked not to hear His voice directly, wanting Moses as a

mediator. But the Lord says that now, through the medium of God's word, the voice of God comes directly to us too. In the new Israel and the new Judaism of the new covenant, in this sense we are each as Moses.

*Saying: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?*- If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

*12:27 He is not the God of the dead but of the living-* This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

Lk. 20:38 adds: "For all live unto Him". The Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead

“live” before Him now. John’s Gospel puts this in so many words by saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn’t happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn. 11:26). Luke’s comment that “all live unto Him” is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him.

*You do err greatly-* The same word used by the Lord in describing how He as the good shepherd was searching for the sheep of Israel who had “gone astray” (Mt. 18:12,13). Exactly because He was searching for them with a view to saving them, He did not indulge in point scoring or exposing the numerous errors in their claims. The fact the Lord even tried with these types is a huge inspiration to us all to never give up with any group of people.

*12:28 And one of the scribes came and heard them arguing; and knowing that he had answered them well, he asked him: What commandment is the first of all?-* It is often claimed that this means ‘Which type of commandment?’. But the Lord’s answer suggests that He saw it as meaning ‘Which specific commandment’. Mk. 12:28 records them asking which is the greatest commandment “of all”, which requires that they wanted Him to name one specific one. Again, the Lord lifted the question to a higher level, quoting two commandments and speaking of them as one single commandment; and demonstrating that the unity of God is a command rather than a mere piece of fundamental but dead theology (see on Mt. 22:37).

*12:29 Jesus answered: The first is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one-* The Lord Jesus taught that the command that God was one and therefore we must love God *included* the second command: to love our neighbour as ourselves. The first and second commands were in fact one command; they were inseparably part of the first commandment (Mk. 12:29-31). This is why the 'two' commandments, to love God and neighbour, are spoken of in the singular in Lk. 10:28: "*this* do...". See on Mt. 22:40.

The Lord was asked which was the first (i.e. the most important)

commandment; we would expect Him to just recite one of them, and to say 'Well, there you are, that's my answer; that's the first one, either numerically, or in terms of importance'. But in reply to this request to name just one of the ten commandments, He actually quotes two of them. There is no greater command (singular) than these *two*. So the Lord saw those two commands as one, the greatest, most important principle of our life before God. Yet He begins by speaking of the unity of God as expressed in His memorial Name, Yahweh your elohim, and says that *this* is what will lead to us loving God with all we have, and also to our loving our neighbour as ourselves. The Lord is saying that if we really appreciate this idea of the unity of God, that Yahweh is our God, then we will *therefore* love God, and also our neighbour. So what does it mean, to love our neighbour as ourselves? In the context of the Decalogue, the neighbour of the Israelite would have been his fellow Israelite, not the Gentile who lived next door to him. The command to love our neighbour as ourselves is elsewhere given an equivalent under the new Covenant: to love our brother or sister in the ecclesia as ourselves. Gal. 5:14 and James 2:8 quote this command in the context of ecclesial life.

The Lord said that the first, the most important, of the commandments was that God is one Yahweh. He didn't see this as an abstract doctrine. He saw the doctrine of the unity of God as a command, it demands behaviour in response to it. He saw the unity of God as part and parcel of the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. Why? Surely He saw that the facts that God's Name is one, and all His people are in some way *in* His Name, mean that we must love others in that Name as much as we love ourselves and as much as we love God. Now apply this to the phenomena of Christian disillusion with the church. We are *in* God, and God is one. So we are all one with each other. Loving our neighbour in Christ as ourselves is placed parallel with loving God with all our heart, strength etc. This means that the main drive of our service to God should be devoted to loving our brother, our neighbour. All those who are baptized into the Name must be loved as we love ourselves. This in itself sinks the possibility of a 'desert island' existence. We just can't live alone. We can't quit on the brotherhood if we want to love God. And this tough, far reaching conclusion comes from knowing that God is one, and all in Him are therefore one.

12:30 *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength-* See on 1 Thess. 1:2. That God is one is a command, an imperative to action. It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, you shall keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4

suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

12:31 *The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself-* This is indeed a challenge; not only to love ourselves, but to relate to our neighbour as to ourselves. It suggests a unique unity between us and our neighbour within the Israel of God. That humanly impossible unity is only achievable by loving the one God. To love God and our brother is all part of the same thing. It is indivisible; the two commandments are in fact one commandment in practice. To claim to love God but not love or even be involved with our brother means, therefore, that we don't actually love God. John makes this explicit in 1 Jn. 4:1, and much of the Lord's teaching does likewise. Yet our tendency is to isolate them, claiming to love God whilst ignoring our brother, and maintaining a strong sense of separation from him.

*There is no other commandment greater than these-* Again, the Lord makes the point. They wanted *one* commandment isolated as the greatest, and He gave them two, with the further comment that "all the law", all the others, hung equally upon those two. The spiritual way of life is not a case of isolating one or two commandments and keeping them, but rather living a spirit of life and thinking. Loving God and our neighbour are seamlessly united, although so many try to do one without the other. On the one extreme is the person who sits at home in splendid isolation with their love for God, on the other is the person who thinks that love for neighbour- some neighbours, anyway- is quite enough, and needs no underpinning in a love for God, which involves keeping His commandments.

12:32 *And the scribe said to him: Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, that He is one and there is no other but He-* In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh. We must love others who bear that Name "as ourselves", so intense is the unity between us. In some ways, we should lose the sense of our own self interest; we should somehow be able to have the same spiritual interest in others (for this is true love) as

we do for ourselves. So this sense of true selflessness which we would dearly desire is connected with an appreciation of the doctrine of the intense unity of God and of His Name, and of the glorious principle of God manifestation. By sharing the one Name, we are one together. See on Jn. 5:23.

12:33 *And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is much more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices-* The Scribe said that the most important commandment to love God "with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (Gk. 'in an intellect-having way'), He said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom". Notice how 'understanding' with the intellect is put higher in the list than loving one's neighbour. The fundamental thing is to correctly understand, and this will naturally lead to a life of practical love. Our surrounding 'Christian' world has inverted this order; love of neighbour has been placed above correct understanding of God. Because the Scribe answered in an intellect-having way, the Saviour said that He was near to the Kingdom. To reach the Kingdom therefore involves correct understanding. The words of Mk. 12:33 allude to a number of OT passages which likewise show the superiority of knowledge and practical service over sacrifices (1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). Putting them together we find the following parallels:

To obey God's word	is better than sacrifice
To listen to God's word	is better than sacrifice
To show mercy	is better than sacrifice
To know God	is better than sacrifice
To be humble and just	is better than sacrifice
To understand God	is better than sacrifice

Understanding God, hearing His word, knowing God (all acts of the intellect) are therefore paralleled with practical things like loving out neighbour, showing mercy, justice etc. These practical things are an outcome of our correct knowledge of God.

12:34 *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him: You are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions-* A correct understanding of the Law and the sacrifices meant that a man was near the Kingdom (Mk. 12:34). The principles of the Lord's Kingdom, His rulership over men, were taught throughout the Old Testament. These very words about asking no more questions are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. Matthew was appealing to Jews to accept Jesus and repent of their wilful misunderstanding, and he and John are holding themselves up as a role model, just as we should in our appeals for repentance. The Greek for "questions" isn't in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him 'Who are You?', for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

12:35 *And Jesus asked, as he taught in the temple: Why do the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?-* They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For they would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin. Lk. 20:41 records that the Lord addressed a question to the wider audience: "How say they that Christ is David's son?". But Matthew says He asked the Pharisees. Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case. Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

12:36 *David himself said in the Holy Spirit: The Lord said-* Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

*To my Lord-* Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

*Sit on My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet-* The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself.

12:37 *David himself calls him Lord; and how is he therefore his son? And the common people heard him gladly-* Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58). The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? The Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence is He his son?*" (AV). The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of Mary

12:38 *And in his teaching he said: Beware of the scribes, who desire to walk in long robes and to have salutations in the marketplaces-* The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (Mt. 20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (Mt. 11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

12:39 *And the chief seats in the synagogues and chief places at feasts-* They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity. Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

12:40 *They that devour widows' houses-* The language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was



'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

*And for a pretence make long prayers-* They were hypocrites. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Mark 12. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

*These shall receive greater condemnation-* There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

12:41 *And he sat down over against the treasury, and watched how the crowd threw money into the treasury; and many that were rich threw in a lot-* The many small coins they threw in make a loud clanging noise in the collection trumpets. They were literally trumpeting their good deeds before men in God's house. The widow threw in the same kind of coins which they threw in in abundance. What she threw in was scarcely audible to men; but the Lord noticed. The only other references to the Lord sitting are to Him sitting in judgment. And that judgment was ongoing even then; it does and will finally take into account the things not audible to men.

12:42 *And there came a poor widow, and she threw in two small copper coins, which make a penny-* The Lord taught that one must forsake all that he has in order to truly be His disciple (Mt. 13:44; Lk. 14:33). But at the end of His ministry, He as it were chose to exemplify this aspect of discipleship by drawing attention to a woman who gave to God "all the living that she had" (Lk. 21:3). Putting the passages together, the Lord is saying that she is to be the model for us all in this aspect of devotion. She could have kept one of the coins; but she threw both of them in.

12:43 *And he gathered his disciples, and said to them: Truly I say to you, this poor widow threw in more than all they that are throwing money into the treasury-* See on 2 Cor. 8:11,12. They were needed to be gathered together to hear this teaching; they had not noticed it, or not been impressed by what the woman did. So clearly, God accounts not as man does. We are judged according to our possibilities and not according to volume of achievement. She threw in "more", literally she 'exceeded',

that the others had thrown in. The same word is used of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). She is again presented as the model disciple. The word has just been used in :33 of how love of God and neighbour is "more" than all sacrifices. She achieved that love not by volume of achievement but in her attitude.

*12:44 For they threw in money they didn't need, but she though needy threw in all that she had- all her livelihood-* The Lord condemned the Pharisees for devouring widow's houses (Mk. 12:40), but then goes on to show how the widow who threw in all her wealth to the treasuries of the corrupt Pharisees had actually gained great approval in God's eyes by doing so (Mk. 12:44). Out of evil, good came. The Lord didn't just lament the cruel selfishness of the Jewish leadership. He pointed out how God worked through even this to enable a poor woman to please Him immensely. There is a wondrous ecology in all this; nothing is lost. Nothing, in the final end, can be done against the Truth, only for the Truth.

The Lord pointed out to the disciples how the extreme generosity of the widow, giving the two pennies of her business capital, her "living", to the Lord, was worth far more than the ostentatious giving of the wealthy Jewish leadership (Mk. 12:44); but the next incident recorded by Mark is the disciples marvelling at the ostentatious buildings of the temple, and the Lord explaining that all this needed to be thrown down (Mk. 13:1,2). Their slowness to perceive is such a theme of the gospel records.

# MARK CHAPTER 13

13:1 *And as he left the temple-* This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (Mt. 23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

*One of his disciples said to him: Teacher, look what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!*- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

13:2 *And Jesus said to him: Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another. All will be thrown down-* This again expands upon His previous use of this word in Mt. 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

The judgment of the leprous house was to be thrown down, stone by stone (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age. This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is

ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, a house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

13:3 *And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately-* The private enquiry was because the Lord had just stated something dangerously illegal. Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet prophecy alone a highly illegal document.

13:4 *Tell us, when will these things occur, and what shall be the sign when these things are about to happen?-* They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4). The disciples (in their childish way) showed the Lord the greatness of the temple, and he commented that soon it would be destroyed. They asked the obvious question: When? Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions; he gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? and what shall be the sign when all these

things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of their coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the same event. The Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but his real coming and the main ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.

13:5 The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

13:9 When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

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*Take heed that no one lead you astray-* "Be not deceived" is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers the Lord spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

13:6 *Many shall come in my name, saying, I am he-* Coming in the name of the Lord, the "I am", was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (Mt. 21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ, is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

*And shall lead many astray-* Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (Mt. 24:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed,

Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority.

*13:7 And when you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be disturbed. These things must take place, but the end is not yet-* The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours of wars*". Lk. 21:9 adds to the other records "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

They were not to be terrified / disturbed. The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

These things were necessary (Mt.), they must happen (Lk.), must take place (Mk.). Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

13:8 *For nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run



up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (Mt. 24:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (Mt. 24:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Muslim nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (Mt. 25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment; the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

*And kingdom against kingdom-* It seems likely from Revelation that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the territory promised to Abraham, the earth/ land of which the Bible speaks so much. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land

promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, the whore riding the beast, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

*There shall be earthquakes-* Just as there was at the crucifixion (Mt. 27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

*In various places-* The word "various" is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in Mt. 24:15 about "the holy place". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount

would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

*There shall be famines-* There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in

the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

*These things are the beginning of the birth pains-* The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah's appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

13:9 *But be warned. For they shall deliver you up to councils, and in synagogues they shall beat you, and before governors and kings shall you stand for my sake, to bear witness before them-* The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues, as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the

synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism. They were to be "delivered up" just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

13:10 *And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations-* This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then "the end comes". The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord's command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

"All the nations" is "in the whole world" in Matthew. The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means 'the inhabited', and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (Mt. 10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached "in", *en*, all the world, and not 'to' the whole world. This may envisage there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be

preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published "among all nations" (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" . This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7); Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to

Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

13:11 *Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial-* The very language of the Lord's final sufferings, which will be fellowshipped / experienced in the latter day tribulation (s.w. Lk. 22:54; 23:1,32; Jn. 18:28; 19:4,13).

*Do not worry beforehand about what to say-* A major theme of the Sermon on the Mount is not to be anxious; the same word occurs in Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34. Here the Lord is surely saying that the general principles He had taught there would have specific fulfilment in time of persecution.

*Say whatever shall be given you in that hour-* "Given you" is language appropriate to Moses and prophets like Jeremiah; it is here applied to the Lord's generally secular followers (Ex. 4:10-12; Jer. 1:6-10). He was continually encouraging them to see that ministries which they had never considered possible of realistic emulation were in fact to be their pattern. Time and again, the Lord is saying that His experience under persecution will be ours. For it was *given* Him what to *speak* (Jn. 3:34; 12:49 same words) and He wants us to know that if we preach Him and seek to replicate His ministry in our own, then God likewise will strengthen us as He did His own Son. We note that it was likewise *given* to the apostles what to *speak* in Acts 2:4; 4:29. They misunderstood the great commission- they twisted it to mean that they must preach to all Jews rather than to all the Gentiles; but by grace, God still kept this aspect of

the promise to support obedience to the commission given; even if it was misunderstood.

*For it is not you that will speak but the Holy Spirit-* Even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 192). It's perhaps the thought behind this idea of not us by the Spirit speaking.

Mt. 10:20 says that the Spirit will speak "in you", not, as we might expect, 'through you'. It may be that the Lord is hinting that if we have the Spirit of God within us, if we are thinking in a spiritual way generally in life, then in times of crisis that Spirit which is in us will guide us to say the right things when under pressure. If we are *now* spiritually minded, with our spirit being God's Spirit, then in that future time of crisis we will know how to speak, the words will come out right, because we have lived now in a spiritually minded way. The idea of the Spirit of God speaking in a person, so that their words are not theirs but God's, was language which Jews would've associated with the Old Testament prophets. Again we see the Lord inviting His secular, immature followers to see themselves as the prophets, those whom they had been taught were in a class of their own, and to whom they as mere secular men could in no way pretend. But the Lord's followers were to be a new Moses, new prophets, a new priesthood, a new Israel.

Luke adds here: "For I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict" (Lk. 21:15). This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say". This persecution led to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev.11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is



understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the three and a half year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

*13:12 And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children shall rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death-* Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

"Deliver up" is a term used about the Lord's delivering to death, just as 'to cause to be put to death' is used of His death (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). Our sufferings in the final tribulation, and for preaching the Gospel generally, grant us a fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. Given the close knit nature of Middle Eastern families, the language of family breakup used here would've been far harder for the initial hearers to accept than it is for many of us. The family was seen as sacrosanct, somehow your family would always be there for you. But the Lord is teaching that the dislike of Him and His message would be such that it would unleash a social and psychological force of hatred such as had not been known previously. Judaism taught that it was only Gentile families which were like this- only Gentiles betrayed their brother, their parents and their children. But the Lord is teaching that through Israel's rejection of Him and His people, Israel were acting like Gentiles and thus becoming as them in God's sight.

This prophecy did not have major fulfilment in AD70, at least not betrayal "unto death". The scale of the rift within families, unto death, was not

seen then within the Christian community. We are left to envisage a situation where family members are pressurized to hand over their other family members to death for the sake of their loyalty to Christ. This sounds like Islamist domination of areas, with this demand made; and that is developed further in Revelation.

13:13 *And you shall be hated by all for my name's sake; but he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved-* Matthew: "hated by all nations". But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen. "For my Name's sake" is a phrase which rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated... for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century. Those who endure the tribulation to the end will be saved in that they will be part of that unique generation which shall never die, but shall be "saved" by being changed to immortality at the Lord's return.

The Olivet prophecy as recorded in Mark 13 has many allusions to the sufferings of our Lord, thereby suggesting that our sufferings during the coming tribulation will make us fellowship the cross as never before. The whole idea of darkness, earthquake, open graves, rocks shaking etc, which we read of in the Olivet and other last day prophecies is evidently the language of the crucifixion. The description of suffering before "the end" comes (Mk. 13:7,13; Mt. 24:14) invites connection with Christ's death also being described as "the end", coming as it did after a period of suffering (Mt. 26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). This connection is strengthened by the way in which each record of the Olivet prophecy leads straight on into the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. There is to be a "little while" between the death of those persecuted in the last days, and the coming of the Lord; using the very same word which John uses for the "little while" of the three days of the Lord's death (Rev. 6:11; Jn. 16:16-19). Rev. 12 speaks of how the dead bodies of the tribulation victims will rest for three and a half days, just as the Lord's body did. They will fully fellowship His death and therefore His resurrection. Similarly, the idea of all God's word being fulfilled by the Lord's death (Lk. 24:44; Jn. 19:28; Acts 3:18) follows on from the prophecy that all will be fulfilled at the time of suffering which heralds the second coming (Lk. 21:22). Mt. 24:13 commends those who endure to the end- of the great tribulation. The

same word occurs in Heb. 12:2,3 about Christ enduring the cross- we fellowship the cross during the last day tribulation. The word in Mt. 24:29 for "the tribulation" is used in Col. 1:24 about the afflictions of Christ. And as the Lord's critics could not find a way to answer Him, so in our tribulation, all our adversaries will not be able to gainsay us (Lk. 21:15). The Lord in Jn. 16:2,4,32 used the term "the hour" to refer both to the 'hour' of His own sufferings, and the 'hour' of tribulation for His people. He clearly saw what He was about to endure as being repeated in the latter day tribulation of those for whom He was about to die.

The other tribulation prophecies, notably in Revelation, are also shot through with allusions to Christ's passion.

"They shall deliver you up to the councils... beaten... rulers and kings for a testimony... brother shall betray the brother... turn back to take up his garment... false Christs...	As Christ to the Sanhedrin Christ buffeted Chief priests, Herod, Pilate Judas; Peter's denial? John Mark's linen garment Barabbas 'son of the father'
the sun shall be darkened... watch and pray... at even... at midnight... at the cock crowing... in the morning... find you sleeping"	As at the crucifixion "Watch with me"; Gethsemane Last Supper Gethsemane Peter's denials Trial and crucifixion Disciples in Gethsemane

13:14 *But when you see the abomination-* The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the

prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

*Of desolation-* The placing of the abomination is what will bring about the desolation. On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic

'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance.

*Standing where it should not-* In Jerusalem, on the temple mount; "in the holy place" (Mt.). On Revelation 17 and 18 I suggest that the whore Babylon will enthrone herself in Jerusalem, through the building of some Islamic and blasphemous religious building or capital there. And this will lead to her desolation. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

*(Let him that reads understand)-* The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach. The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that reads understand" Daniel's prophecies- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him... understand... let him... not go down... let him... not return... let them... flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses

the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up paying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works. See on Heb. 5:6.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *reads*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When you shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that makes desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When you shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

"Let him that reads understand" is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "Let him..."

understand" is paralleled with "let him that is on the housetop [flee immediately]... let him that is in the field not return". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

*Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains-* This is the equivalent of the plea in Revelation to flee out of Babylon, the latter day Islamic complex to be built in Jerusalem on the temple mount.

The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in Mt. 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (Mt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

"To the mountains" is better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (Mt. 24:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the

final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

13:15 *And let him that is on the housetop-* The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years, leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (Mt. 24:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of Mt. 24:40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

*Not go down, nor enter in to take anything out his house-* The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains". This is a type of the



response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

*13:16 And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak-* The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of Mt. 24:40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left".

*13:17 But alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days!*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor. 7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe to them... who give suck", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

13:18 *And pray that it is not in the winter*- The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of God's prophetic dealings with Israel; and Mt. 22:22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

13:19 *For those days shall cause distress, such as there has never been similar, from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never shall be again*- The LXX uses this same word for "distress" or "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance: "The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3) "The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)

"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.

"Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.

"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7)

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days.

Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming. At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

13:20 *And except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved*- "Saved" here ("there should no flesh be saved") implies 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit? The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

*But for the elect's sake, which He chose, He shortened the days*- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. The days will be shortened for the elect's sake; for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring specifically to the group of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (Mt. 24:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (Mt. 24:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [*eklektos*], whom He has chosen / elected [*eklegomai*]". The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being

scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end time; for the elect's sake the days until the second coming are shortened. And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfilment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days.

The Lord's description of the shortening of the days uses some rather odd past tenses: "Except the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect's sake... he shortened the days" (Mk. 13:20 RV). One wonders if we have here an allusion back to the days of Noah, where again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

For the elects' sake, the days to the second coming *will be* shortened (Mt. 24:22); but the Lord also said, perhaps in the same sentence, that the days *have already* been shortened (Mk. 13:20). This shows that God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion. See on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elect's sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue

with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

13:21 *And then if anyone shall say to you-* This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

*Look, here is the Christ! or Look! There he is!- do not believe them-* "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here... or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

13:22 *For false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray (if possible) the elect-* The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet... and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (Mt. 12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (Mt. 16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a "sign" predicting the Lord's coming (Mt. 24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous

“sign” from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous “sign” of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the “signs [s.w.] of the times” (Mt. 16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a “sign”. He responds by giving them a list of “signs of the times”. However, it would seem from Mt. 24:30 that there will in fact be the “sign” of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the “signs” shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord’s warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing “signs and lying wonders” (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there’s no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we’ve now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to “keep you from falling” by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God’s work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term “the elect”; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.

A major theme of the prophecy is the danger of being deceived (Mt. 24:4,5,11). The need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

13:23 *But be warned, I have told you all things beforehand-* In place of the Olivet prophecy, John's gospel has the message about the Comforter. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Lord is present in our hearts with such reality that it is as if He were with us. All calls to go out and see Him here or there will therefore intuitively be found false by us. And the connection with the Comforter passages continues in this verse, with a clear link to Jn. 14:29: "And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe". The Lord was referring to the predictions of His sufferings and death; but here, the context is of the latter day tribulation. Those tribulations are to enable those who pass through them to fellowship with the sufferings and death of the Lord, that they might share in His immortality.

The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (Mt. 24:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

13:24 *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened-* After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightning in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (Mt. 24:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

*And the moon shall not give her light-* Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-

10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; Joel 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity... men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

13:25 *And the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers that are in the heavens shall be shaken*- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (Mt. 24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

13:26 *And then shall they see the Son of Man*- In Matthew, when "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]... then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (Mt. 26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation



would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

*Coming in the clouds*- Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (Mt. 24:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the

prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

*With great power and glory-* The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of Mt. 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

13:27 *And then shall he send the angels-* The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the

call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated "Send... Angels" are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: "I send My messenger before Your face" (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John's message of repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (Mt. 23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them.

*And shall gather together his elect*- Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on Mt. 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Mt. 13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive 'gathering together' of the faithful. The point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

*From the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven*- Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the

same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on Mt. 24:31 *Power and great glory*.

13:28 *Now from the fig tree learn its lesson-* Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

*When its branch becomes tender-* The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6: "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and

these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. "When his branch is yet..." is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be 'If, so long as... the branch is tender, it can yield fruit'. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only 'so long as' that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord's appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel's repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

*And puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near-* The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had "leaves only" (Mt. 21:19), but now the Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say "yes" to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken

literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (Mt. 21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this in parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the

nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

13:29 *So you also, when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near- at the doors-* Lk. 21 "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]	When [Gk. <i>hotan</i> ]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]	You know [Gk. <i>ginosko</i> ]
That summer is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]	That it is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> ]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. <i>eggus</i> "]

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: "When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of 'about' or 'upon', perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural "doors". I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being 'upon the doors' may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still 'tender' and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for

sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the 'other' usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epi* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

13:30 *Truly I say to you: This generation shall not pass away-* This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until...'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this generation*" rather than "*that generation*" surely suggests the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, "generation", clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord's second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

*Until-* If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but



that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

*All these things happen*- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

13:31 *Heaven and earth may pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom

could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :30 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *Ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:

- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "The kings of the earth take custom or tribute" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on from the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

*But my words shall not pass away*- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :30. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential *logos*. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation.

13:32 *But of that day or that hour- Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the Olivet prophecy: "Those days" (Mt. 24:19), "those days should be shortened" (Mt. 24:22), "the tribulation of those days" (Mt. 24:29), "the days of Noah" (Mt. 24:37), "the days that were before the flood" (Mt. 24:38). So the Lord isn't necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in Mt. 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because "you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes". When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that "the times or seasons" have been "set within [the Father's] own authority" (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord's return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is also the possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour.

*Knows no one except the Father, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son-* There's a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated "knows", carries the essential idea of 'seeing' or perceiving. We are to "see" / know / perceive the abomination of desolation, and when we "see" / know / perceive "all these things, know that it is near". And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming. The reason is made crystal clear in Mt. 24:42: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes". Mt. 25:13 repeats this: "Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes". The 'watching', therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (Mt. 24:43). But if he doesn't know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their 'watching' is not so

much a personal readiness for the Lord's coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of 'watching' the "signs of the times".

13:33 *Be warned, watch and pray. For you do not know when the time is-* This could be taken as a criticism, rather than stating a truism. It is true that we do not know the time of the Lord's return and therefore we should watch constantly. But we should consider the possibility that the last generation, as they pass through the tribulation, will in fact see prophecy fulfilling so accurately that they can foresee the Lord's coming. It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the

time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to the councils	As Christ to the Sanhedrin
beaten	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother	Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment	John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...	An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
Watch and	"Watch with me";
pray...	Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing	Peter's denials
in the morning	trials and crucifixion
find you sleeping	disciples in Gethsemane

13:34 *Like a man going on a journey; on leaving his house, he puts his servants in charge, each according to his assigned tasks. He also commands the gatekeeper to stay awake-* Each has his or her calling, and therefore we should each have a sense of authority because we realize this. We have a job to do, a mission to accomplish, and we have authority from the Lord Himself. For the Son of man gives to *each* of His servants both "authority" and his or her specific work to do (Mk. 13:34). See on Mt. 21:41.

His enthusiasm for us comes out in Christ's description of Himself as 'taking a far journey' away from us to Heaven. The Greek strictly means 'to leave one's own native people to go abroad'; with the implication that the Lord feels closer towards us than to the Angels. He is somehow away from home whilst absent from us. This is exactly the line of argument of Hebrews 1 and 2: Christ didn't come to save Angels, He came to save us, therefore He had exactly our nature and feelings, not theirs.

The "porter" was commanded to watch; and he represents us all (:37). Watching over God's household is an idea taken from Ez. 3:17; as the prophets in the Old Testament parables of judgment were the watchmen

of the house of Israel, so each of us are. When the Lord had earlier told this parable, Peter (like us) asked the obvious question: "Do you speak this parable to us (the twelve in the first century), or even to all?" (Lk. 12:41). The Lord's basic reply was "To all", although He didn't say so explicitly. Instead He said that if the Lord of the servant was away and came back unexpectedly, late at night, what a joy it would be to him if he found the lights on and the servant working diligently in caring for the others; *any* servant doing that is going to give his Lord joy; 'So, Peter, don't think about whether others are called to do the job, this is the ideal servant, you're all servants, so you get on and try to be like this ideal servant!'. The porter's job was to keep out wolves; the Greek for "porter" literally means 'the watcher' (s.w. Jn. 10:1, another example of how the parables fit together). An apathy in looking out for false teachers means we aren't doing the porter's job well, we are sleeping rather than looking after the household. Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, rather than the hobby of trying to match current events with Bible prophecy.

*13:35 Therefore stay awake. For you do not know when the lord of the house comes, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning-* The motivation for watching, being away at the Lord's coming, is because we have a duty to the rest of the household. Pursuit of personal salvation is not of itself a very strong motivator. And we must be ever alert because we do not know when He shall return; for Bible prophecy is to be understood after the event, or whilst the event occurs, and is not intended to provide a timeline of future events.

The Lord says that we are *all* the watchers of the door of the house of the ecclesia (Mk. 13:34,35; Lk. 12:39,40), as the prophets were the watchmen over the city of Zion, God's Old Testament ecclesia. We *all* therefore have a responsibility to guide and warn the ecclesia, not just to scrape out of condemnation for ourselves, but from a genuine, earnest desire to help others to the Kingdom road.

We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). See on Lk. 6:47.

*13:36 In case he comes suddenly finding you asleep-* The suddenness of the Lord's coming will only be felt by those who are asleep and as it were disturbed from their sleep. For those who are alert, His coming will not

have this 'sudden' and 'unexpected' aspect to it. The connection is clearly with the parable of the virgins; and yet despite this exhortation to stay awake, they are slumbered. The "wise" were only saved by their awareness that they were likely to run out of oil, their spirituality was not so solid, and they recognized that.

13:37 *What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!*- Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, this is the result of our awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return.

"Watching" is not only a guarding of one's own spirituality; the idea of guarding a house and the people and goods inside it suggests that our watching is of our brethren and sisters too. Elders "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17) in this sense. Christ's parable about the gate-keeper might at first suggest that the duty of watching is only with the elders; it is for *them* to watch and feed the flock, in the same way as it was the duty of the house manager to guard the house and feed the other servants (Mt. 24:43-51; Mk. 13:33-37). But that parable is intended for *all* of us; "Watch ye therefore (as intensely as that manager)... and what I say unto you, I say unto *all*, Watch" (Mk. 13:37). In other words, we are all elders, the command to watch for each other extends to each of us. And yet how really concerned are most of us about each other's salvation?

# MARK CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Now it was two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread; and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might arrest him using trickery and kill him-* This could imply that they tried to arrest Him before the feast, but decided to delay their plans until after the feast (:2). But the Lord was master of the situation. His life was not taken from Him but He gave it, and psychologically arranged the situation so that He would die as the Passover lambs were slain. He therefore arranged the situation in Bethany to provoke Judas to go and offer to betray Him to the Jews, knowing they would immediately jump at this opportunity.

The same word for "arrest" is used four times in Mt. about the 'taking hold' of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:48,50,55,57). This 'laying on of hands' against the Lord is likewise strongly noted by Mark (s.w. Mk. 14:44,46,49,51). The sight of it was burnt into their memories. There are likewise parts and aspects of the Lord's sufferings, and words associated with them, which are likewise burnt in the consciousness of all those who truly love Him.

"Trickery" is as AV "*By subtilty*"- an allusion to the Lord's Jewish opposition as the seed of the serpent at whose hands the seed of the woman was wounded (Gen. 3:15). But the word literally refers to a bait, implying some plan to deceive Him into a position in which they could arrest Him. But what were these plans? The Lord fell for no bait. Perhaps the idea was that Judas would come and kiss Him, and lead Him into some isolated ambush or compromising situation. When the Lord made it clear to Judas that He knew what Judas was up to, the plan fell apart and the soldiers simply grabbed the Lord. And they ended killing Him "on the feast day", which was exactly what they had planned to avoid (:2).

The plan made ahead of time to kill Him was clearly typified by the brothers' plans to kill Joseph.

14:2 *For they said: Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people-* Yet they did arrest the Lord during the feast; another indication that He manipulated the situation so that He gave His life as the Passover lamb. So they did crucify the Lord during the feast, at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed. Their plan went wrong- see on :1. Try as they might to not kill Him then, the Lord wanted to die as the Passover lamb, and this happened despite the Jews *not* wanting that. The Lord had control over the time of His death, because He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.



Their fear of an "uproar" indicates the popularity the Lord enjoyed even at that stage, and the fact He was crucified with the general goodwill of the masses is therefore an essay in the fickleness of human nature. And yet the careful plans of the leaders didn't work out- there was "a tumult" about it, the same Greek word translated "uproar" (Mt. 27:24), and likewise they did end up killing Jesus "on the feast day" when it was not their intention to.

14:3 *And while he was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table-* The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was

Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

*There came a woman with an alabaster vial of ointment of pure nard- very expensive. She broke the vial and poured it over his head-* Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely Mary inspired him.

The Greek *bar-utimos* uses a term, *utimos*, elsewhere used about the precious, costly blood of Christ. Matthew uses it about the "price" of the Lord's blood (Mt. 27:6,9), as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:7). The point is simple. The Lord's blood shed for us was and is the most valuable thing in existence, in the entire cosmos; and we should feel that when we take the cup which symbolizes it. And our response is to give our most valuable things, materially and otherwise, for Him.

The woman anointed the Lord's head in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she

even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness... this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

Mary's devotion to the Lord, based on the understanding she had, is truly inspirational. The original word translated "nard" is a foreign [non Greek] word, and appears to have originated far away from Palestine. The suggestion has been made that this bottle of nard belonged to some foreign royalty. The price of "more than three hundred pence" must be understood in terms of a penny-a-day employment rate for labourers (Mt. 20:2). This bottle would typically only be used at the burial of a king. Yet Mary dearly loved her brother Lazarus, and had only recently buried him. But she hadn't used the nard for *him*; hence perhaps the information is added that his body would be stinking after four days- implying such expensive nard had not been used in embalming *his* body (Jn. 11:39- the fact it's Martha who observes this may suggest she resented Mary for not using her nard for Lazarus, just as she resented how Mary didn't help her in the kitchen but instead sat at the Lord's feet). And the Lord Jesus perceived all this; for He commented to the disciples that Mary had "kept the nard for *my* burial" (Jn. 12:7). The Lord's reference to her 'keeping' the nard can be powerfully understood in the context of Mary not using it for her brother's burial, but rather deciding to keep it for His burial. This not only shows the clarity of Mary's understanding of the Lord's upcoming death. It also reflects how she would give her most treasured possession in an apparently senseless act of devotion to Him. She anointed Him because she understood Him to be Christ, the anointed one. But this is what we expect of a woman who won the accolade from the Lord that she sought after the "one thing" that really matters- which is Him and His word (Lk. 10:42). Our eyes have been opened to that same "one thing", and we too claim to have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Christ; and so to place devotion to Christ above family, above retention of personal wealth and value... is the intended issue of all this for us too.

14:4 *But there were some that had indignation among themselves, saying-* The indignation was among or "within" themselves, and so the words they are here recorded as saying were likely within themselves. We wonder how many other times when we read of people 'saying' something, the 'saying' was within their own minds. For self-talk is understood by the Lord as our actual words. Whether or not we hold our tongues back is not the ultimate issue. The words have been said within us. See on 26:10 *When Jesus understood*. If the reconstruction of events I offered in commentary on :8, we can better understand their frustration. They would have seen an identical 'waste' of wealth in the anointing of four days previously in the same village, perhaps in the same home; and they had seen it in Galilee at the incident recorded in Luke 7. And they were doing their math and calculating the total cost 'wasted'.

*For what purpose-* The Greek *eis tis* could equally mean 'For whom?', the implication being that the poor could have been benefitted far more than the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord replies that the purpose of the anointing was to embalm Him ahead of time for burial. Just as the woman was inspired by the generous anointing of Mary four days previously and the Galilean prostitute of Luke 7, so the huge amount of spices purchased by Nicodemus in Jn. 19:39 was likely motivated in turn by her example. Critics claim that the amount of spices ("one hundred pound weight") bought was more than used in the burial of the Caesars. The woman here used a pound of spikenard, worth more than the 300 pence at which Mary's anointing liquid was valued. And in turn, Nicodemus was motivated yet more- 100 times more. She gave one pound, he gave 100 pounds' weight. This is the reason for the *deja vu* of our lives, of how experiences repeat between human lives- it's so that we may be inspired to greater service than even those who went before.

*Has this waste of the ointment been made?-* "Waste" is the same Greek word used nearly 20 times in the NT for destruction and condemnation; it is the same word used in describing Judas as "the son of *perdition*". The tragedy of condemnation is the waste of what could have been. This is the sadness with which God sees condemnation. We note that four days before, it had been Judas who complained about the 'waste'. His attitude had spread to the disciples. But the paradox was that he was thereby the son of waste, he was condemning himself by complaining about the waste of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The idea could even be that they were so angry that they thought that the woman was condemning herself by what she had done, because she could have given the money to the poor. This is seen so often in religious experience- those who stand on the sidelines become so bitter at how others actively express their devotions to their Lord that they go so far as to condemn them. We think of how Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, and was punished with barrenness; and of the Lord's observation: "Is your eye evil, because I am good / generous?" (Mt. 20:15). The world's wealthiest individuals are often very generous to charitable causes- and yet they do so to a chorus of criticism from those who have given little or nothing to such causes.

14:5 *For this ointment might have been sold for above three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they scolded her-* The very words used by the Lord to the rich ruler, telling him to sell what he had and give to the poor (Mt. 19:21). Their idea in saying this may have been to accuse the woman of disobedience to the Lord's teachings. We see here how deep are the feelings aroused by spiritual jealousy. This woman had made a stellar commitment to her Lord; and quite unspoken, her devotion challenged the other disciples. And so by all means they had to condemn her, and were happy to misquote the Lord's words to achieve that. This is

one simple reason why those most active and sacrificial in church life are often the most viciously attacked by their fellow disciples.

*14:6 But Jesus said: Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work-* The Greek has the idea of beauty. The same Greek phrase rendered "a good work" is found in 1 Tim. 5:10 as something required of a mature spiritual woman, and for which she must be "reported"- clearly alluding to how this woman's "good work" was to be told / reported worldwide. She thus became a model for other sisters to follow, in the same way as she herself had copied the examples of Mary four days previously, and the sinful woman of Luke 7. This is the intended power and purpose of good works- they serve as inspiration for others to likewise glorify the Lord. The Greek expression 'to work a [good] work' is used elsewhere regarding the Lord's working of miracles (Jn. 6:28; 9:41; 10:33). Her response was no less significant than the working of a miracle.

*Upon me-* The Greek *eis eme* could as well mean 'in Me', as if the woman's work gave the Lord huge encouragement within Himself.

*14:7 For you have the poor always with you, and whenever you want you can do them good-* Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

Note that the Law also taught that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poverty. And yet the same Law tacitly recognized the reality of human weakness in noting that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Dt. 15:11). God's law therefore also reflects His grace and understanding of human failure to be fully obedient.

*But me you do not have always-* We would likely have been tempted to expose the root of the immediate problem- Judas was a thief, and wanted the cash because he would keep some of it and only distribute part to the

poor. But the Lord as ever, was wiser than to confront issues in such a primitive way. He brushes past the complaint that this woman had ignored His principle of selling what we have and giving to the poor, and doesn't expose the core reason for Judas' trouble stirring about the issue. Rather He focuses upon what the woman *had* achieved, and bids the disciples look closer at His death and how they should be responding to it. "Always" is literally, 'at all times'. There would always be opportunity, times of opportunity, to do good to the poor.

We find an example of Paul holding up Mary Magdalene as our example in 2 Cor. 8:12, where he speaks of how the Lord although He was rich became poor for our sakes, and we ought to be inspired by this to generosity towards our poorer brethren. The connection with Mary Magdalene goes back to Mk. 14:7, where Jesus said that Mary *had* in fact given her wealth to the poor, by anointing Him, the poor one, the one who made Himself poor for our sakes.

14:8 *She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for the burying-* This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. The Greek means specifically embalming. It was as if the woman perceived that the Lord was effectively the slain lamb of God even whilst He was alive. It is used only once more in the New Testament, describing the embalming of the Lord's body (Jn. 19:40).

Whether the woman of Mk. 14:8 really understood that she was anointing His body for burial is open to question. But the Lord's positivism graciously imputed this motive to her. See on Mk. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:11,12.

14:9- see on Acts 10:4.

*And truly I say to you: Wherever in the whole world the gospel shall be preached, what this woman has done shall be spoken of as a memorial to her-* Her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of this woman. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in her- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake.

There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we

read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. The Gospel records are transcripts of the Gospel preached by e.g. Matthew. The Gospel is therefore in the Gospels. The rest is interpretation and theology, necessary and helpful, but there is no avoiding the fact that the Gospel itself is in the records of the Gospel which we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Lord foresaw that transcripts of His work and words would indeed be made, and He envisaged how the supreme devotion of this anonymous woman would be part of that message. The language is very similar to that of Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel... shall be preached [*kerusso* again] in all the world... and then shall the end come". Matthew may have had in view how his version of the Gospel needed to be spread into all the world.

This could mean that when the Gospel message is proclaimed in all the world at Messiah's return, then what Mary had done would be told [before God] that He may mercifully remember her for good at the judgment. This may sound a forced interpretation to Western ears and eyes, but we must remember that the idea of 'for a memorial' denoted being spoken of for good before someone, in this case, the judge of all. What follows from this is that there will be a direct link between our deeds today, and the judgment process of tomorrow [or later today]. What we have done will be told before God, and He will remember us for good. On one hand, works are irrelevant. We are saved by grace. On the other hand, there will be a certain 'going through' of our deeds before Him. Quite simply, there is a direct link between our behaviour and our future judgment. Nothing will in that sense be forgotten.

The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. Mark records how the Lord commanded the Gospel to be preached world-wide (Mark 16:15); but he surely intends this to be linked with his record of how the generosity of the sinful woman would be told "wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world" (Mk. 14:9). 'The Gospel' was therefore not just the basic doctrines of the Gospel; it was the whole record of the life and works of Christ. This is why each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. And the comment that wherever the Gospel was preached, her example would be preached (Mk. 14:9) is tantamount to saying that her action was to be the pattern for all who would afterward believe the Gospel. Note in passing that the Gospel was not intended by the Lord to be a mere set of doctrinal propositions; it was to be a message which included practical patterns of response to it, of which Mary's was to be always mentioned.

The language of 'memorial' is typically used in contemporary literature about memorials to the gallant deeds of *men*. But the Lord was challenging such thinking by saying that the Gospel would include a memorial of an anonymous *woman*. And her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth in a ten minute act of devotion to Him was none less than the bravest or noblest act of any man.

14:10 *And Judas Iscariot, he that was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests, that he might betray him to them-* In all the Gospel records, the decision of Judas to betray the Lord follows on from the anointing incidents. I suggested on :1 that the Lord set up the whole scene, knowing that the apparent waste of so much money would deeply irk Judas and trigger the betrayal. People who are obsessed with money as he was often find such things unbearable to be part of. Judas is repeatedly called "Simon's son" at this time. And the anointing took place in Simon's house. It could well be that Judas was a member of the family, possibly even a brother of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. To see the family wealth 'wasted' in this way was unbearable for him. The reasons for his betrayal were surely multi-factorial, but attitudes to money played a large part. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him...?" clearly suggests a financial motive; and the records seem to give the impression that the apparent waste of money, especially if it was money he thought might be coming to him in the inheritance, was the final straw for him. After that, he went to the Jews and opened discussions about betraying the Lord. The way he threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the ground reflects his final realization of how foolish he had been. And yet the lesson is so often never learnt; men and women effectively betray their Lord for money; accumulation of wealth, development of career, take precedence over devotion to Him, and finally lead to betrayal.

14:11 *And they, when they heard it, were glad; and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him-* Matthew says they gave him 30 pieces of silver immediately, but this would have been a down payment for a future promise of money.

14:12 *And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover, his disciples said to him: Where will you have us prepare for you the Passover to eat?-* Lk. 22:8 adds the detail that actually this was said in response to Peter and John being told to go and prepare the Passover. Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox that the Lord directed them to an upper room that was already "prepared" (s.w.), and there they prepared the Passover. The Lord had taught that the festal meal was already prepared for His people (22:4 s.w.). The Lord was surely using the language of Passover preparation in saying that He was going [to the cross] to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3)- and He said that at the very time Passover was being prepared. His request that *they* prepare Passover was therefore asking for a mutuality in response from them.



We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. Reflect how the disciples, with all the petty pride of the practical man wishing to do something practical for the leader he adores, earnestly asked the Lord where to prepare for Him the Passover. He told them to find a certain man, and ask him where the Master would eat Passover *with His disciples*. He would show them an upper room furnished and already prepared. '*There*', the Lord added with His gentle irony, 'prepare for *us*, not just me but you as well, to eat. Even though I've already arranged it all, and I'm inviting *you* to eat with *me*, well, I understand you must feel you do your little human bit, so there *you* prepare; although I've already prepared it all'. 'What love through all his actions ran'. This was grace and understanding and accommodation of men *par excellence*.

14:13 *And he sent two of his disciples and said to them: Go into the city and there you shall meet a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him-* This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

14:14 *And wherever he enters, say to the master of the house: The teacher asks, where is the guest room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?-* The "guest room" is the same concept as in Jn. 14:2, where there in that very guest room which they had "prepared", the Lord says that He is now going to the cross to prepare *them* a room, an eternal place in the Father's house. He wished them to perceive a mutuality between them and Himself; what they had done, He was now going to do on a far greater scale. And to this day, we sense this mutuality between us and our Lord.

14:15 *And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare it for us-* The room was "ready" and yet there they were to "prepare"; "prepare" translates the same Greek word as "ready". All was prepared; the Lord was the Passover lamb and had prepared Himself for an untimely death, just as they were to keep Passover in advance of the 14th Nissan. They were to show willingness to do their part, but they could not fully do it. It has been done for them already. And we get this impression in all our attempts at labour for the Lord.

14:16 *And the disciples went into the city and found as he had said to them. And they made ready the Passover-* As noted on :15, it was already "made ready", so they just did the cosmetic arrangements. We likewise can add nothing really to the Lord's sacrifice.

14:17 *And when it was evening he came with the twelve-* There is no actual mention of the slaying of the paschal lamb, which should have been done that evening. It had already been strangely provided for them.

14:18 *And as they sat and were eating, Jesus said: Truly I say to you, one of you shall betray me- even he that eats with me-* The Lord had repeatedly predicted that He would be 'betrayed' or 'handed over'. But He had not defined who would do it, indeed the form in which He had spoken of being 'handed over' was vague and didn't necessarily require that one individual would do it. We must remember that *paradidomi* means literally 'to hand over' and doesn't carry the sense of personal betrayal which the English word 'betray' is loaded with. They were there shocked when He stated that "one of you" would do this.

14:19 *They began-* The idea is that they all burst out with the same question at the same time. And yet Mk. 14:19 records that they asked this "One by one". The scene is imaginable- after initially all bursting out with the same question, they try to ask Him the same question personally in order to get an answer. Which is why Judas asks the question somewhat later. Again it is commendable that their very first reaction was to wonder whether they personally could be the betrayer- rather than 'Lord, is it *him?*'. But after realizing that it was not them personally, naturally they began to look at one another, wondering whom He was speaking of (Jn. 13:22). Although "doubting of whom He spoke" (Jn. 13:22) really means they were at a loss to know. Clearly they had absolutely no suspicion that it was Judas. And when Judas is told "What you are doing, do quickly" and Judas exits (Jn. 13:27-29), they still assume that he must have been sent out to minister to the poor [suggesting there were beggars around the feast, again hinting that the last supper was not held behind closed doors]. This again speaks to us who replicate the last supper week by week. Some will indeed betray their Lord, but we have absolutely no idea who they are.

*To be sorrowful-* It is commendable that their dominant emotion was of sorrow rather than anger. We perhaps would have expected anger more than sorrow. But their sorrow is a reflection of the degree of their love for the Lord, and their sorrow for the person who would face the awful consequences of doing so.

*And to say to him one by one: Is it I?-* Some texts read: "And another said, Is it I?". It is easy to assume that this "another" was Judas. But it has been suggested that in spoken Aramaic, "and another said..." would be a device for saying 'And I, I said...'. If Mark's Gospel is a verbatim

account of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, this would be so appropriate. Peter would be saying: 'All the disciples couldn't imagine it was them who would betray Jesus; and I, yes I also asked if it was me who would betray Him. I was so sure I wouldn't'. The record in Mark 14 then goes on to describe how Peter *did* effectively betray / deny the Lord.

The negative implies the answer 'No, you are not the one'. It was more than a question- it was a declaration of innocence. This is the basis for self-examination at the Lord's table; we should be able to do it and conclude that we are not the Lord's betrayer. Some who sit at that table will betray Him, and we are to realize the very real possibility of our own ultimate failure, the eternity of the future we may miss. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later, and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (Mt. 26:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

14:20 *And he said to them: It is one of the twelve. He that dipped in the dish at the same time with me-* The past tense is important, for if the Lord was predicting a future event, then all the disciples would be looking carefully at the dish. "Dipped", *em-bapto*, carries the suggestion that there was liquid or water within the dish. Lamb is greasy, and there would have been dishes of water on the table in which the diners dipped their hands. The Lord had done that at the same time as Judas, and must have pressed His fingers against those of Judas. But none of the others had noticed. Jn. 13:26 says that "It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it"- perhaps meaning that the Lord had put a crumb of bread into Judas' fingers whilst their hands touched in the bowl. Any other reading of the incident faces the obvious difficulty that if indeed the Lord publicly pointed Judas out as the betrayer, there would have been no confusion as to why he went out into the darkness. And we would expect to read of an outcry amongst the 11 against Judas; but the record instead stresses that they totally didn't suspect Judas until he was out of the room. Mk. 14:20 adds that the Lord said that the man was "One of the twelve" who had dipped his hand with the Lord in the dish. This suggests there were others apart from the twelve eating at the table and dipping their hands in the dish. It was not therefore a closed communion. There would have been no need for such a "large" room (Lk. 22:12) if only the twelve were present.

He lamented that His betrayer was one who had dipped in the dish with Him at the last supper. There was no way that this was meant to be an indication to the disciples that Judas was the betrayer- for they all ate the supper and dipped in the same dish. Hence His point was surely to foreground the awful fact that *it was a brother who had broken bread with Him* who would now betray Him. Ps. 41:9 laments that it was one who "ate of my bread" who betrayed Him. This is why the challenge "Lord, is it I?" echoes down to every communion service.

14:21 *For the Son of Man goes*- The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in Mt. 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (Mt. 16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

*Even as it is written of him*- Jn. 13:18 is specific: "But the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me". The reference to the heel naturally suggests the Gospel promise of Gen. 3:15. But it seems the wrong way around- it is the seed of the woman who lifts up a bruised heel with which to crush the seed of the serpent. There is no lack of evidence that on the cross, the Lord identified totally with sinners, to the point that He felt forsaken just as sinners are forsaken. Or perhaps Judas justified his actions by deciding that Jesus was a false Messiah, the seed of the serpent, and the righteous thing to do was to crush the serpent with his heel.

*But woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed!*- The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible

prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

*It would be better for that man if he had not been born-* "Better" shows how the Lord is sympathetically looking at things from the perspective of Judas. For in Jn. 14 He reasons that His departure is good for all concerned. The Lord foresaw Judas' agony at the last day. But the Greek can bear a retranslation: 'It would be virtuous for that man if he did not conceive / gender'. In that case, there would be yet another appeal for Judas to stop dead in his heart the conception of sin. The Lord elsewhere uses words with two [or more] meanings in order to deliver a specific message to an individual, within a statement of general truth which appeared intended for others. The messages He sent back to the imprisoned John the Baptist are a clear example. The Lord's last ditch attempts to save Judas, rather than allow himself to be so hurt by him that He just ignored him, are a powerful encouragement to us in dealing with those who harm us and wilfully do evil.

14:22 *And as they were eating-* Eating the Passover lamb. The bread and wine were accessories, side dishes, and the Lord takes these things and makes them so significant. He doesn't, e.g., take some lamb and divide it between the guests with the message that "This represents My body". Even though the lamb was the more obvious symbol of Himself than the bread was. He wanted the last supper to be repeated by poor and ordinary people, who had bread but not lamb each week; He used common, readily available bread because that spoke more of His humanity, His ordinariness. He used what was to hand, just as we can for the breaking of bread.

Note that Judas was still present at this point. Jn. 13:18 makes the point concerning him that "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me". If Judas broke bread with the Lord, this surely indicates that there is nothing intrinsically sinful in breaking bread with sinners. The quotation from Psalm 41 is interesting in the LXX: "the man of my peace, on whom I set my hope". There was special potential in Judas, and the Lord on one hand had hopes for him. It has been argued that the giving of the "sop" to him was the sign of special love and fellowship. Jn. 13:20 goes on to say: "He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send, receiveth me". The 'receiving' in this context is receiving at the Lord's table. To reject others from His table is to reject the Lord.

*He took bread-* Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (Mt. 14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely

open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread, *neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

*And when he had blessed it-* It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

*He broke it and gave it to them, and said: Take, eat-* The use of *didomi* ["gave"] is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. Lk. 22:29 says that the Lord then used the word *didomi* again: "This is My body, which is given for you". The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

*This is my body-* He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be

read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

14:23 *And he took a cup*- This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Mark was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

*And when he had given thanks*- Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo* for the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drank weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which we bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

*He gave it to them and they all drank from it-* The Lord held the memorial meeting as a keeping of a Passover, and yet He changed some elements of it. Joachim Jeremias cites evidence that "By the time of Jesus, individual cups were used at the Passover meal", and yet Mk. 14:23 implies that He used only one cup, which was passed around amongst those at the last supper: "He took the cup [RV "a cup"]... he gave it to them: and they all drank of *it* [singular]". They didn't take up their own cups and drink- the Lord gave them His cup, just as He passes on to all in Him a participation in His "cup" of suffering and final joy. Reflect how deftly and determinedly the Lord must have "received the cup" (Lk. 22:17 RV), knowing what it represented; imagine His body language. Paul's references to "*the* cup" imply the same. This change was surely to indicate the unity that His death, His blood, His life, was to inspire amongst those who share in it. This, in passing, is behind my undoubted preference for not using individual cups at the memorial meeting. It would seem to be a returning to the Jewish legalistic tradition, however unintentionally. I have elsewhere commented upon the clear link between the death of Jesus and our unity. The memorial meeting is the supreme celebration of that unity between us. To deny a brother or sister participation in it is something serious indeed. Tragically, and it is a tragedy, we have tended to use the memorial meeting as a weapon for exclusion rather than as a celebration of our unity. Yet this was the intention, without doubt. Comparing Lk. 22:20 and Mk. 14:24 we find the Lord saying that the cup of wine was "for you poured out, poured out for many"- as if He wanted them to be aware at the memorial meeting that it was not only they who had been redeemed in Him. Likewise the Passover was essentially a remembering of the deliverance of a community, through which the individual worshipper found his or her personal salvation. This is why it is just not good enough to insist on breaking bread alone, or with no thought to the fact that all of us were redeemed together, as one man, as one nation, in Him. Remember that the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is "derived from a verb meaning 'to eat'". That covenant was made with a community, the Israel of God; by eating the covenant meal we recall that collective covenant, that salvation of a community of which we are part- and it is appropriate therefore that it becomes a symbol of our unity within that community. The Old Testament idea of covenant is associated with words like *hesed* (kindness, love, devotion, grace), *emeth* (truth, integrity), *emunah* (faithfulness, allegiance). These are the characteristics associated with being in covenant relationship; and we are to show them to all others who are in covenant relationship, not just some of them.

14:24 *And he said to them: This is my blood-* Given Jewish obsession with blood and ritual uncleanness arising from contact with it, such language was surely purposefully challenging and radical, just as He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in Jn. 6:53. This made many turn



away when He said it, but the Lord realized that His followers had to make a total break with Judaism. The drift of some Christian believes back towards the mentality of Judaism is totally missing the Lord's point- He was speaking in such challenging terms to make His followers realize that there was no middle path of compromise between Him and Judaism. Although He never commanded them to leave the synagogue system, and assumed they would remain in it until they were thrown out of it, all the same the Lord stated His principles in such a way that it would've been effectively impossible for His followers to remain within that system.

*Of the new covenant, which is poured out for many-* The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from

the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Moses bound the people into covenant relationship with the words: "Behold the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8). These very words were used by the Lord in introducing the emblems of the breaking of bread (Mk. 14:24). This is how important it is. We are showing that we are the covenant, special Israel of God amidst a Gentile world. Indeed, "the blood of the covenant" in later Judaism came to refer to the blood of circumcision (cp. Gen. 17:10) and it could be that the Lord was seeking to draw a comparison between circumcision and the breaking of bread. For this is how His words would have sounded in the ears of His initial hearers. This is how vital and defining it is to partake of it.

14:25 *Truly I say to you: I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine-* An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for

the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

*Until the day when I drink it anew-* This is not 'new' in the sense of freshly made (a different word is used for that), but new in terms of quality, not time. It speaks of a new quality, a freshness, rather than something 'new' in chronological terms. The new wine represented the blood of the new covenant which was shed on the cross. It could be argued that the drinking of this new wine became possible not simply at the last day, but in this life too, in the experience of the church after the Lord's shedding of that blood on the cross.

*In the kingdom of God-* The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

The Lord Jesus clearly saw a link between the breaking of bread and His return. He not only told His people to perform it "until he come", but He said both before and after the last supper [putting together the Gospel records] that He would not keep this feast until He returned. Our breakings of bread are therefore a foretaste of the final sitting down with Him in His Kingdom- for He had elsewhere used the idea of feasting with Him as a symbol of our fellowship with Him at His return. The Rabbis had repeatedly taught that Messiah would come at Passover; the first century Rabbi Joshua said that "In that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed by Messiah". Much evidence could be given of this. For this reason Josephus records how the Jewish revolts against Rome repeatedly occurred around Passover time. Yet all the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord's second coming from Heaven bearing

our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: "At four times in the year is the world judged". Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat.

The Lord's promise that He would not break bread again until He did it with us in the Kingdom (Mk. 14:25) seems to require a literal fulfilment. In a non-literal sense He breaks bread with His people even now. Therefore His statement that He would not do it again until the Kingdom seems to refer to His literal taking of bread and wine. Likewise His promise that He would literally gird Himself and come forth and serve us at a future banquet has to be linked in with this (Lk. 12:37). If all the faithful are to be gathered together to a meal, and literally eat bread and drink wine with the Lord, this suggests all sorts of logistical and practical 'problems'. It is easier to understand that space and time will have different meanings at the judgment and after.

14:26- see on Jn. 17:1.

*And when they had sung a hymn-* Probably the Passover hallel of Ps. 115-118. It's worth reading those Psalms imagining them on the lips of the Lord at the last supper; they are pregnant with relevance for His forthcoming death, especially the reference to "I will take the cup of salvation". Heb. 2:12 surely has the scene in mind, quoting "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You" as being proof of the Lord's absolute humanity. The fact He sung praise to *God* surely reveals a human and not Divine Christ. But doing so amongst His brethren, "the church", as one of them, is an essay in His unity with us, both in nature and experience.

*They went out to the Mount of Olives-* The Passover ritual required that nobody should go out of the house until morning (Ex. 12:22). This is clearly teaching that the Passover deliverance had already begun, even before the Lord's blood had been shed, and would connect with the usage of present tenses concerning the Passover and shedding of the Lord's blood (see on :2,28). This sets the scene for the Lord's comment in :32 that He would go before them, and they should follow Him. He was as Moses and as the Angel which went before Israel on Passover night. The allusion to Ex. 12:22 shows that the old legislation had passed away, and in any case the type of Passover being kept by the Lord was not strictly the Mosaic one- for it's likely He was celebrating it a day earlier than stipulated. But the point perhaps was that the true Israel of God were now 'going out' from Egypt; so certain was the Lord that He would achieve deliverance that He could speak of that deliverance as already being achieved. He didn't, therefore, see His work on the cross as

something which He might or might not successfully achieve- as we should, He went ahead in the certainty of ultimate success and victory.

14:27 *And Jesus said to them: All of you shall fall away. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad-* See on Mk. 4:17. They would spiritually stumble and fall because Zech. 13:7 predicted this would happen. But the Lord goes on to urge them to watch and pray so that they do not succumb to temptation. He saw Biblical prophecy as being open ended in fulfilment- the prophecy of spiritual failure didn't have to come true. They could resist, sin and failure is never inevitable. He spoke to them in the upper room specifically so that they would *not* be offended (Jn. 16:1 s.w.); the prophecy didn't have to come true in the disciples, and the Lord did His utmost to provide the potential for it not coming true for them.

His death was to be as that of Moses, which left the Israel of God as sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27:17). And yet the Lord's death would gather together the scattered [s.w.] people of God (Jn. 11:52), His death was as a shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). His death and resurrection was to be the means of reviving the lost faith of the disciples- when they meditated upon it. The people of Israel at the Lord's time had had no true shepherds and were therefore as scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36). The Lord's death would therefore temporarily leave the disciples just like the rest of Israel- they would return to the mentality of Judaism, the 'satan' of the Jewish system and its thinking would tempt them and they would give in. The wolf of Judaism would scatter the sheep (Jn. 10:12). The disciples were therefore as sheep who scattered because of the thinking of the Jewish world around them, who saw death on a cross as the final defeat for a man; and yet were to be gathered by that very death. Peter was one of those disciples, even though he insisted that *he* would not be scattered even if others were. He surely had this in mind in appealing to other believers who were falling under the influence of Judaism: "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned [s.w. 'converted'- just as he was 'converted' to strengthen his brethren] unto the Shepherd... of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was therefore appealing to others to follow his own pattern- of revival and conversion after spiritual failure. This is the basis for all powerful pastoral appeal.

14:28 *However, after I am raised up-* There is no equivalent of "after" in the Greek text. This is an insertion by translators in order to try to give sense to the three brief Greek words which simply say "And I rise again". The idea is that 'By My rising again, I will go before you...'. The Lord's plan was that His resurrection would re-ignite faith in His disciples, and He would go before them as a shepherd leads His sheep, into Galilee.

*I will go ahead of you into Galilee-* This is the language of the shepherd

going before the sheep (Jn. 10:4), in obedience to His voice. The Lord is saying that although they will stumble and lose faith, His resurrection will provide them with a credible word from Him which they would obey by following Him into Galilee. This is why the resurrected Lord's first instruction to the women was to "Go tell My brothers that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (28:10). But it actually didn't work out like that. His meeting with them in Galilee was in fact the third time He revealed Himself to them (Jn. 21:14). He appeared to them twice before that. And the picture we have of the disciples fishing in Galilee in Jn. 21 is of them still relatively faithless, depressed and having returned to their fishing; they are hardly pictured as eagerly awaiting the Lord's promised appearance in Galilee. So it seems to me that the Lord changed His intended program with them. Their faith was so weak that He appeared to them in Jerusalem twice, whereas He had originally planned for the women to tell them His word- to go before Him into Galilee, and there He would reveal Himself to them. But in His love for them, His own desire to see them, His awareness of their weakness in faith... He appeared to them twice *before* Galilee. And even then, we sense from the fishing incident of John 21 that they were still floundering in their faith, and may well have returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, rather than in obedience to His word. Why did He so wish to meet them in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem? Their journey to Galilee would've been a test of obedience for them, for sure. But surely the Lord reflected by this choice the paramount importance He placed upon the conversion of families. He wanted to appear to them there, surely, because that was where most of them were from, and where their families were. He wanted them too to be persuaded once and for all time of the reality of His resurrection.

This promise sounds very much like a conscious allusion to the Angel going ahead of Israel; as if Christ felt that He (through the Comforter Angel?) had taken over the role of the Angel that represented Him previously?

14:29 *But Peter said to him: Although all shall fall away, I will not!*- Peter three separate times states that he will not fail the Lord (also in Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). Literally, 'not at any time', i.e. 'not even once'. Hence the Lord's comment that Peter would deny Him not once but three times. Yet he denied the Lord three times, and it was on the Lord's third appearance to him (Jn. 21:14) that the Lord undid the three denials by His three questions concerning whether Peter really loves Him, and three times (again by a charcoal fire) re-instates Peter in the work of strengthening his brethren. These tripilisms and repetitions serve to make the record memorable, and also reflect how somehow the Lord worked through Peter's failures with some overarching plan; there was a higher hand at work through all of the failure, reflected in these tripilisms which

could only have been effected by a Divine, higher hand. The Lord's question to Peter "Do you love Me more than these?" surely has reference to the other disciples, whom Peter had thought himself spiritually superior to. He was sure that even if they stumbled, he would not. And the Lord paid special attention to undoing this attitude in Peter and specifically bringing him to realize that he was no better than his brethren. Any sense of spiritual superiority over others is so obnoxious to the Lord. And He will work in our lives to remove it from us, as He did with Job, Jonah and many others. Peter continually alludes to his denials throughout his appeal for Israel's repentance in Acts 2 and throughout his pastoral letters; it is our own failures and receipt of such utter grace which serve as the basis for our credible and persuasive appeal to others to repent. He spoke in 1 Pet. 2:8 of how the Lord Jesus is a stone of stumbling ['offence', s.w.] to those who do not believe- and yet he said this fully aware that he had been one of those who stumbled over Jesus. Mt. 21:44 offers us the choice- to stumble upon the stone and be broken, or for the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder, in the figure of judgment and condemnation used in Daniel 2. We either stumble in failure upon Christ and rise up as Peter did, broken men and women, to do our best in serving Him- or that stone shall crush us in condemnation. That is the choice before us, and Peter is the parade example in this to all.

*14:30 And Jesus said to him: Truly I say to you, yes to you today, that this night-* Much of the Lord's knowledge and foreknowledge of events ahead of time can be explained in terms of His incredible sensitivity to others, His understanding of human psychology and behaviour patterns. But there are times when it seems He was given direct foreknowledge from the Father. And this seems one of them- to predict the exact number of denials that would be made that night, and to predict they would happen before the cock crew. This leads to the possibility that whenever He prefaces His words with "Truly I say unto you...", He is stating something received by direct revelation. Another example is when He uses this rubric to introduce His prediction of how Peter would die (Jn. 21:18). This would be His equivalent of how the Old Testament prophets introduced their directly inspired words with the rubric "Thus says the Lord". "Truly" (AV "verily") is literally 'amen', as if the Lord Jesus is saying that He is aware of the words of His Father and in uttering them from His lips, is giving His personal agreement, stamp or 'Amen!' to them.

*Before the cock crows twice-* There is no article in the Greek. 'Before cock crow' is the idea, before the earliest sign of morning when the first cock crew, that very night, before that night even began to come to a close. Crowing "twice" may mean that the cock would not need to crow twice, before Peter thrice denied Him.

*You shall deny me three times*- There is more detail about the denials in Mark because Mark appears to be writing for Peter; Peter's presentation of the Gospel emphasized his own failures. The Roman persecution of Christians required the converts to three times deny the Lord Jesus. Perhaps such emphasis is given to Peter's triple denials in order to encourage those who failed that test that their relationship with the Lord was not finished; and in fact they were in good company.

It's been pointed out that chickens couldn't have been anywhere near the High Priest's house because the priests forbade anyone in Jerusalem from keeping chickens, lest they stray into the temple. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* points out that the priest who was the temple crier was called the *Gaver*, Hebrew for 'cock' or 'rooster'. This man opened the temple before dawn and called the priests and people to make the morning sacrifice. And he did this two or three times. Surely the Lord was referring to this when He spoke of the 'cock' crowing. Each time, Peter was being called to make the sacrifice with Jesus; but instead he denied knowledge of Jesus and the call to the cross which that knowledge entails. The context of the Lord's warnings to Peter about his forthcoming denial was that Peter had insisted he *would* die with Jesus, sharing in His sacrifice. And the Lord was foretelling that when that call came, Peter would deny the knowledge of Jesus.

14:31 *But Peter said emphatically: Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you*- Gk. 'If I must die' or 'If it be necessary that I die, I will'. And yet the Lord had taught that He was going to die on the cross, and that all who would truly follow Him should likewise die with Him. When the Lord stated this in Mt. 16, Peter had earnestly sought to dissuade the Lord from that course of action because He didn't want to die with Him. Peter had a problem accepting the inevitable reality of the cross and its demand that we likewise lose our lives for Him. He considered it the most extreme possibility, rather than an obviously necessary sacrifice which is part and parcel of being a true follower of Jesus. We likewise can consider that extreme self-sacrifice is something we might possibly be called to make. But in fact if we are truly signed up to carrying the Lord's cross, it is exactly such radical self-sacrifice which is indeed required of us. The Lord said that Peter was not yet able to die for Him, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and *then* he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

"I will not deny you" surely alludes to Mt. 16:24, where the Lord has urged Peter to accept that he must deny *himself* and take up the Lord's cross and die with Him. But instead, because Peter didn't want to do that, he would end up denying Jesus. This is the intensity of our choice- if we



will not deny ourselves, then we shall deny Jesus. The Lord had clearly taught that whoever denied Him before men would be denied by Him at the last day (Mt. 10:33), and Paul repeats this (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter stood condemned by that denial, and yet we can be condemned in this life and change the verdict if we repent. It is this which releases such fervency into our lives if we go through the experience of condemnation but perceive that the verdict has been mercifully changed. Peter appealed to Israel to recognize that they had denied Jesus (Acts 3:13,14 "You denied Him in the presence of Pilate"); and he made that appeal a stone's throw and only a few weeks after his own denials of Jesus in the presence of all. And yet this was why his appeal was so credible, as was his later appeal to believers not to do the worst imaginable thing, namely to deny the Lord who had bought them- for that was exactly what, as everyone knew, Peter had himself done (2 Pet. 2:1). John speaks of denying Christ as the hallmark of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22 "He that denies Jesus... is the antichrist"), and he wrote this knowing full well that Peter was the rock upon whom the early church had been built. His point, therefore, is that even those who had done that, the antichrist, could still repent as Peter had done.

*And they all said the same-* Mt. "Likewise also", using two words are used when one would suffice, such is the emphasis upon the fact that they all said the same. Peter was the one who went furthest in seeking to live out his claim, and yet he it is whose failure is the most emphasized. And that is how it is often is amongst God's people. But it is because we are asked to identify specifically with Peter.

14:32- see on Mk. 5:1.

*And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples-* The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

*Sit here while I pray-* The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and

then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not to* give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

The whole structure of Mark's Gospel seems designed for memorization- the material is arranged in triplets, and the sections have chiasmic structures [e.g. material arranged in the form ABA, ABCBA, ABCDCBA]. Even within the triplets, themes often occur in triplets- the three experiences in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42), Peter's three denials (Mk. 14:66-72), three wrong answers about the identity of Jesus (Mk. 6:14-16; 8:28). The use of triplets and tripilisms is common in folk stories- to aid memorization. We shouldn't be unduly phased by the idea of the early Christians memorizing the Gospels. Even today in the Islamic world, students in religious schools are expected to memorize the entire Koran, which is roughly the same size as the entire New Testament. There are reports of this even being achieved by a seven year old.

14:33 *And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled-* As Moses took Joshua with him. AV: "He was amazed". The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a deliverance, akin to Isaac's at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question "Why have You forsaken Me?". This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

14:34 *And he said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful even to death-* This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

The Lord's psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord's death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

"Exceeding sorrowful" uses the same word used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

*Stay here*- This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

*And watch*- The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples

here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

14:35 *And he went forward a little-* Lk. 22:41 "About a stone's cast", pointing us back to David's conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord's final conflict with sin.

*And fell on the ground, and prayed-* Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God's presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father's presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven

strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

The Lord had foreseen how He must be like the grain of the wheat (note the articles in the Greek) which must fall to the ground and die, and then arise in a glorious harvest (Jn. 12:24). But soon after saying that, the Lord fell to the ground (same Greek words) in prayer and asked the Father if the cup might pass from Him (Mk. 14:35). It seems to me that He fell to the ground in full reference to His earlier words, and asked desperately if this might be accepted as the falling to the earth of the grain of the wheat, i.e. Himself, which was vital for the harvest of the world. Don't under-estimate the amount of internal debate which the Lord would have had about these matters. The spirit of Christ in the prophets testified Messiah's sufferings "unto Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11 RVmg.), but He still had to figure it all out. And this enabled an element of doubt, even though in the end He knew "all the things that were coming upon him" (Jn. 18:4). To doubt is not to sin. Another Messianic Psalm had foretold: "In the multitude of my doubts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19 RVmg.). This aspect heightens the agony of His final crisis, when He unexpectedly felt forsaken.

*That, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him-* See on Lk. 22:46. This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. "Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even to the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resolvable, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

Matthew records the Lord's prayer that the cup might pass from Him; here, that the hour might pass. Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

14:36 *And he said: Abba, Father, all things are possible for You; remove this cup from me-* "We cry Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), as our Lord did then (Mk. 14:36). We can, we really can, it is possible, to enter into something of our Lord's intensity then. Paul saw his beloved brother Epaphroditus as "heavy" in spirit (Phil. 2:26), using a word only used elsewhere about the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can also do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

*However, not as I will but what You will-* Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

14:37- see on Mk. 14:72.

*And he returned and found them sleeping, and said to Peter: Simon, why do you sleep?-* "Comes... and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (Mt. 21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

There are good reasons for thinking that Mark's Gospel record is actually Peter's; and in his preaching of the Gospel he makes ample reference to his own failures [he contains the most detailed account of the denials of

all the Gospels] and to the misunderstanding of his fellows. Both Matthew and Luke record that the Lord asked the three disciples 'Why are you [plural] sleeping?' (Mt. 26:40). It is only Mark who says that the Lord asked this of Peter personally, in the singular (Mk. 14:37). And compare Matthew's "Could you [plural] not watch with me?" with Mk. 14:37 to Peter: "Could you not [singular] watch?".

*Could you not watch one hour?*- Peter later urged his converts to "be watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house. Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4; 1 Acts 22:7 = 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

14:38- see on Acts 20:29,30.

*Watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation*- The relationship between prayer and temptation may not simply be that the Holy Spirit will be provided to fortify us against temptation if we pray. If we are in prayer, in the Father's presence, then we are less likely to just give in to temptation. However, the connection between prayer and strength against temptation is proof enough that Bible reading is not the only strength against temptation. So much more help and succour of the Holy Spirit is available (Heb. 4:15,16). The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (Mt. 24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records. "That you do not fall into" is addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the



Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

*The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak*- The Lord took a very positive view of his struggling, stuttering followers, especially in the run up to His death. His teaching had throughout emphasized the importance of the heart, and how thought and action are linked. Yet He appears to have made a temporary exception when He generously excused His disciples' sleeping in Gethsemane: "The spirit [mind] truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mk. 14:38). The theoretical willingness of the mind does not usually excuse fleshly weakness, according to the Lord's teaching. It seems to me that this statement of His, which for me gets harder to interpret the more one ponders it, is simply the Lord's generous, justifying impulse towards His weak followers. And He was feeling like this towards them at the very time when, in symbol and in essence, they had condemned themselves. For He 'comes' to them, finds them asleep, like the sleepy virgins in His recent parable, they were dumbfounded and unable to answer Him, just as the rejected will be at judgment day, and then they fled, as the rejected likewise will (Mk. 14:40,41,51). If these were His generous feelings for them, then... what comfort it is to know we follow the same Lord.

14:40 The disciples' sleepiness is excused in the statement "for their eyes were heavy" (Mk. 14:40), even though their falling asleep at that time was utterly shameful. Luke's record excuses them by saying they slept for sorrow- which isn't really possible. It's the grace of inspiration covering up for them. Yet He kindly says that their spirit is willing but their flesh was weak (Mk. 14:38); although elsewhere, the Lord rigorously demonstrates that mental attitudes are inevitably reflected in external behaviour, and therefore the difference between flesh and spirit in this sense is minimal.

The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

The word "weak" is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 "weak" = Rom. 5:6 "without strength"). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

*14:39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words-* This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

*14:40 And again he returned and found them sleeping. Their eyes were very heavy-* It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated "heavy" occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep". Mk. 14:40 adds that "They did not know what to answer Him", and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

*And they did not know what to answer him-* Not only did the Lord Jesus 'answer' to the needs of others, but He Himself was a silent, insistent question that had to be responded to. He came and found the disciples

sleeping, and they didn't know what to *answer* Him (Mk. 14:40). His look, the fact that when facing super exhaustion and sleep deprivation He endured in prayer... this was something that demanded, and demands, an answer- *even if we can't give it*. He responds / 'answers' to us, and we have to respond / answer to Him. This is how His piercing sensitivity, coupled with the height of His devotion, compels the building of real relationship between ourselves and this invisible Man.

*14:41 And he returned a third time-* The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

*And said to them: Sleep on now-* The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :42 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

*And take your rest-* Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (Mt. 11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

*It is enough. The hour comes-* Mt.. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in Mt. 26:46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

*The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners-* Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (Mt. 17:22), to the chief priests (Mt. 20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But

now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

14:42 *Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby-* If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control, leading Himself to them- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself. Judas was leading the soldiers (Lk. 22:47); but the Lord was leading Himself toward them.

14:43 *And immediately, while he yet spoke, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd-* The appearance of Judas is as it were called forth by the Lord, who went to as it were meet Judas before he even appeared (:42). The Lord had set up the whole situation, and Judas was acting according to plan. The repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (Mt. 26:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 Gk. puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas...", to encourage us to re-live the incident. The crowd with Judas was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

*From the chief priests and the scribes and the elders bearing swords and staves-* This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross.

14:44 *Now he that betrayed him had given them a signal, saying-* These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the

prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is *against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

*Whomsoever I shall kiss-* The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him (Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

*That is he. Take him and lead him away safely-* The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

14:45 *And when he arrived, immediately he came to him and said: Master, Master; and kissed him-* But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :46 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

14:46 *And they arrested him-* The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

*And took him away-* Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the

'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

14:47 *But one of the disciples that was standing nearby drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear-* Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (Mt. 26:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and

healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]”.

14:48 *And Jesus said to them: Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?*- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (Mt. 26:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

14:49 *I was daily with you in the temple teaching and you did not arrest me*- The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas*, "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

*But this is done that the scriptures might be fulfilled*- This can be read as part of the Lord's words, or the comment of Matthew. "Is happening" is

translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent, to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps. 31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

There is a sense of compulsion associated with the cross. The Greek word *dei*, translated "must" or "ought", is repeatedly used by the Lord in reference to His death. He spoke of that death as the coming of His hour, as if always and in all things He felt a compulsion that He must die as He was to. Listing the references chronologically gives an impressive list: "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures *must be fulfilled*" (Mark 14:49). Three times in say 30 minutes, the Lord has stressed the compulsion of the cross.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14)

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he *must* go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders" (Mt. 16:21).

"And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; Saying, The Son of man *must suffer* many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and [*must*] be slain, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:21-22).

"And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he *must suffer* many things, and be set at nought" (Mark 9:12). These last three references all occurred within a day of each other, if not a few hours. The Lord at least three times was emphasizing how He *must* die the death of the cross.

"Nevertheless *I must* walk to day, and tomorrow, and the day following: for *it cannot be* that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33)

"But first [i.e. most importantly, not just chronologically] *must he* suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation" (Luke 17:25).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man *must be lifted up*? who is this Son of man?" (John 12:32-34). When the Lord spoke of "If I be lifted up", there was no doubt about it. The idiom was correctly understood by the people as meaning: "I absolutely *must*". And for them this was a contradiction in terms: a "son of man" Messiah who *must* be crucified.



"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover *must* be killed" (Luke 22:7).

"As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also *I must* bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (John 10:15-17). Embedded in the context of prediction of the cross, the Lord described that act as being how He *must* bring His sheep unto Himself.

"But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that *thus it must be?*... For I say unto you, that this that is written *must yet be accomplished* in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me *have an end*" (Matt 26:54; Luke 22:37). See on Lk. 24:6.

14:50 *And all the disciples left him*- Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken *Me?*" (Mt. 27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

*And fled*- Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

14:51 *And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him*- It is possible to argue that the young man who followed Jesus and then ran away was in fact Peter; it was Peter who "followed him" at this time (Mt. 26:58). Mk. 14:54 RV tells us after this incident that "*Peter* had followed him afar off". Peter describes himself in the third person a few verses previously: "A certain one of them that stood by drew a sword..." (Mk. 14:47 RV). And then we go on to read in v. 51 of "a certain young man" (RV). But when speaking of his denials, Peter records them in the first person- he totally owns up to them. All of Mk. 14:27-52 concerns Peter's part in the story, and then vv. 54-72 likewise. So it is likely that the record of the young man following disguised in a linen cloth is in fact referring to Peter too. So Peter followed, ran back, followed again, then ran away to Galilee, and

then followed again. This was how hard it was for him to pick up the cross of identification with Jesus and follow Him. And for us too.

14:52 *But he left the linen cloth and fled naked-* If indeed the man was Peter, then he was demonstrating that he was not in fact prepared to go to prison and death with his Lord, as he had so confidently claimed. He ought to have taken this as a warning against being so confident that he would not deny his lord.

14:53 *And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and there came together all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes-* This recalls Psalm 2; the Gentiles gathered together against the Christ in Jerusalem. Those pious men were no more than Gentiles.

14:54 *And Peter had followed him at a distance-* This following of Peter is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (Mt. 16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

*Right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire-* "Into" is the same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

Mt. "and sat with the officers". The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the

servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publicly, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

14:55 *Now the chief priests and the whole council-* Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal. In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publicly in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

*Sought evidence against Jesus to put him to death, and did not find it-* The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (Mt. 10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

14:56 *For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree-* This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many

false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

14:57 *And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying-* Mt.- there were two. The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

14:58 *We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands-* They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

14:59 *But not even then did their testimony agree-* The utter weakness of the case is emphasized. They could not even agree amongst themselves as to what false story to give.

14:60 *And the high priest stood up in their midst and asked Jesus- As a judge arises to give the verdict.*

*Do you answer nothing?*- One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

*What is this that these witnesses say against you?*- The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man's witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn't work out; see on Mt. 26:5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave His life.

14:61 *But he held his peace and said nothing*- The High Priest 'answered' to this silence, according to Matthew. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

*Again the high priest questioned him, saying: Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*- The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death

penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1; Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

14:62- see on Mt. 24:28.

*And Jesus said: I am, and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven-*

The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who

wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

14:63 *And the high priest tore his clothes and said-* Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 ed.), p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

*What further need have we of witnesses?-* Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

14:64 *You have heard the blasphemy. What think you?*- The spiritual culture of Almighty God is shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that. No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

*And they all condemned him to be worthy of death*- The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother 'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

14:65 *And some began to spit on him and to cover his face*- This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only



command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

*Striking him-* Slapping Him. A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

*And saying to him: Prophecy!-* They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophecy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such.

*And the guards took him and beat him with their hands-* Men smote "the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1). The RVmg. of Mk. 14:65 says that the Lord was hit with "strokes of rods". Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment.

14:66 *And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came-* Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

*One of the maids of the high priest-* Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to describe the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him,	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple

	saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you say.	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming

				themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And	

	had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

14:67 *And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!*- This has the ring of circumstantial truth to it. The light from the fire would have drawn attention to the features of Peter's face. He would have been well known in Jerusalem as the Lord's right hand man. We see here another hint at the simplicity and lack of wisdom in Peter. And yet he was the one the Lord used so powerfully.

14:68 *But he denied it, saying-* Matthew stresses the denial was before them all. Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (Mt. 10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to

death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

*I neither know, nor understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew-* Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

Bible minded Peter must surely have later reflected that he had said those very words: 'I know not this man'. He "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet he was able to repent and come back. Peter's self condemnation is brought out in yet finer detail by considering what he meant when he thrice denied that he either knew nor understood about Jesus (Mk. 14:68). By that time, everyone had heard about Jesus- after all, the trial of Jesus was going on, and all Jerusalem were waiting with bated breath for the outcome. And there was Peter, standing by the fire in the High Priest's house, with everyone talking about the Jesus affair. Peter hardly would've meant 'Jesus? 'Jesus' who? Never heard of him. Dunno who you're talking about'. What he therefore meant, or wished to be understood as meaning, was that he didn't 'know' Jesus in a close sense, he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, he didn't know nor understand Jesus, i.e., he wasn't a follower of Jesus. When Peter tells the maid: "I know not, neither understand what you say [about this Jesus]" (Mk. 14:68), the other records interpret this as meaning that Peter said that he didn't know Jesus. So we may have to interpret the form of speech being used here; for Semitic speakers don't answer questions in the same way and form as we may be accustomed

to. The "what you say" was about Jesus; and therefore Peter is saying that he neither knows [closely] nor understands this Jesus. And yet time and again, Peter's Lord had taught that those who did not or would not 'know and understand' Him were those who were "outside", unknown by Him, rejected. And Peter was saying, to save his skin, 'Yes, that's me'. And yet... Peter repented, and changed that verdict. Mark's record of the Lord's trial is not merely a historical account. It's framed in terms of our need to testify for our faith too. The Lord's example in His time of suffering was and is intended to be our example and inspiration, in that we are to in a very practical sense enter into His sufferings. Mark records the Lord's prediction that His people would have to witness before both Jewish and Gentile authorities (Mk. 13:9-13)- and then Mark goes on in the next chapter to describe Jesus doing just this. The Lord asked His suffering followers not to prepare speeches of self-defence- perhaps exemplified and patterned for us in the way that He remained silent before His accusers. Peter is recorded as denying Christ three times- just as the Romans interrogated Christians and asked them to three times deny Christ. The Christians were also asked to curse, or *anathematizein*, Jesus. And when we read of Peter's cursing, the same word is used. We're left with the impression that Peter actually cursed Christ. And so Mark, who was likely writing the Gospel on Peter's behalf, is showing that Peter, the leader of the church, actually pathetically failed to follow his Lord at this time. And yet the Gospel of Mark was being distributed to Christians who were being dragged before Jewish and Roman courts. The idea was surely to give them an example and encouragement from Peter's failure, rather than portray a positive example of a man overcoming the temptation to curse and deny Christ. But this was how the Lord used Peter- as an example from failure for all of us.

"Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant "went out" and condemned his brother- thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. In Mk. 14:68 he

records himself as having said: "I know, neither understand I what thou sayest". He stresses the nature of his own rejection of knowledge of the Lord. A similar awareness of the weakness of the flesh is found in 7:21: "From within, out of the heart of man...".

14:69 *And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!*- Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial. This is absolutely psychologically credible.

14:70 *But he again denied it. And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter-* John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :66. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" suggests he kept on and on denying.

*Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean-*

From the larynx of a Palestinian Jew there came the words of Almighty God. And yet He spoke them in the accent of a rural Galilean. We know this because Peter was identified as being one of the Lord's close disciples because of His accent (Mt. 26:73; Mk. 14:70). The dialect of Aramaic used in Galilee was a permanent topic of sarcasm in Jerusalem circles. There is a story in the Mishnah (bErubin 53b) which mocks how the Galileans pronounced words which began with a guttural [deep-throat] consonant. It ridicules how a Galilean in Jerusalem tries to buy something in a market but is mocked by the merchant: "You stupid Galilean, do you need something to ride on [*hamair-* a donkey], or something to drink [*hamar-* wine], or something to make a dress with [*'amar-* wool], or something for a sacrifice [*immar-* lamb]". What an essay in God's preference for using the things which man despises- that He should arrange for His Son to speak His words in the most humanly despised dialect of the ecclesia. In this context, it is interesting to note the debate over the original text of Mk. 5:41, where the Lord is recorded as saying the Aramaic words *Talitha kum* in the oldest manuscripts, but it seems



this has been changed to the more grammatically correct *Talitha kumi* in later codices. *Kum* would apparently have been the slovenly Galilean way of speaking, whereby the masculine form of the imperative is joined to a feminine subject. It could be that the Lord spoke in the Galilean way, technically incorrect grammatically- as a Londoner might say 'We was waiting for a bus' rather than 'we were waiting...'; or an Ulsterman 'how are yous all?' rather than using the more correct 'you' for 'you' plural. If this is so, we have another window into the person of Jesus. There was a naturalness about Him, an expression of the ultimate image of God in totally human form, which was so attractive.

14:71 *But he began*- The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

*To curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak*- Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true. Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not... neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation. This can be read as meaning that Peter actually cursed Christ, as well as taking an oath that he didn't know Him. Commenting on the verb form of *anathematizein* there, Raymond Brown comments: "[it] should be taken transitively with 'Jesus' understood as the object: Peter cursed Jesus and took an oath that he had no personal acquaintance with him" - R.E. Brown, *The Death Of The Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1994) p. 605. I find it significant that the most awful detail about Peter's denials is provided in Mark's record, which I have suggested elsewhere is in fact Peter's record of the Gospel, written up by Mark.

"This man" suggests he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

14:72 *And immediately the second time the cock crew. And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times. And as he thought upon it, he wept*- It is only Mark who records the two cock crowings at the time of Peter's denial.

Peter wished to quietly emphasize the exactness of fulfilment of the Lord's words about his denial. Mark / Peter likewise record Peter's words as: "I neither know nor understand what you mean". The 'what' can apply to both Jesus personally as well as the general 'being with' Jesus. Peter is admitting that He had denied having any understanding at all of the Lord- the Lord whose knowledge he now preached. One can imagine Peter's voice quivering as he recounted his Gospel story. Note how Luke says that all the disciples slept in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:45); but Mark [Peter] records how only Peter, James and John slept (Mk. 14:37).

"Peter remembered" the Lord's words. The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to "remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

# MARK CHAPTER 15

15:1 *And immediately in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole council, made their decision and bound Jesus and took him away and delivered him up to Pilate-* Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God's word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (Mt. 12:29). For "Took Him away" see on Mt. 26:57 *Led Him away*.

15:2 *And Pilate asked him: Are you the King of the Jews?-* Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

*And he answering said to him: So you say-* Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

15:3 *And the chief priests accused him of many things-* The accusations

were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

Is. 53:7 speaks of the Lord at this time as being uncannily silent: " as a sheep before *her* shearers is silent". The LXX has: "Because of his affliction he opens not his mouth", as if the silence was from pure fear as well as a reflection of an internal pain that was unspeakable. Job's experience had foretold that the cross would be what the Lord had always "greatly feared". The Passover Lamb, so evidently typical of the Lord as He approached death, was to be *male*. And yet Is. 53:7 conspicuously speaks of a female sheep. Why such an obvious contradiction? Was it not because the prophet foresaw that in the extraordinary breadth of experience the Lord was passing through, He was made to empathize with both men *and* women? He felt then, as He as the seed of the woman stood silent before those abusive men, as a woman would feel. This is not the only place where both the Father and Son are described in feminine terms. It doesn't mean, of course, that the Father is a woman; what it means is that He has the ability to appreciate and manifest feelings which a male would not normally be able to. Through His experience and zeal for our redemption, the Lord Jesus came to the same ability as His Father in these areas. Those who have suffered most are the most able to empathize. And yet somehow the Lord exceeded this principle; it was true of Him, but *such* were His sufferings and such His final empathy that this isn't a fully adequate explanation as to *how* He got to that point of supreme empathy and identity with us that He did. *Exactly* how He did it must surely remain a mystery; for God was in Him, reconciling the world unto Himself by that fully and totally representative sacrifice. The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice, as a sheep before her shearers. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother

was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family. "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments. And yet the woman was to be silent... as Christ was. All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband". And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

15:4 *And Pilate again asked him: Have you no answer to make?*- The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19 "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on to say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being

understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

*See how many accusations they make against you-* The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; here and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

A theme of the whole record is that the Lord gave His life of His own volition. This must be remembered as we reflect upon the background to the crucifixion. His refusal to answer Pilate meant that Pilate had to pronounce Him guilty (Mk. 15:4)- hence his marvel at the Lord's silence, as if the Lord was willingly allowing Himself to be condemned.

15:5 *But Jesus made no further answer; so that Pilate marvelled-* This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62,63; see on Mt. 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record.

Philo describes him as "ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for "frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was "amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: "Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of "inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for "abusive behaviour... and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke's record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it''. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

15:6 *Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them-* The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the

book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

*Whomever they requested-* Or, "wanted" (Mt.). In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in Mt. 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (Mt. 26:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (Mt. 26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painless of itself to pray the Father's will be done (Mt. 6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (Mt. 26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.



15:7 *And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man named Barabbas- Son of Abba, the father.* This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

15:8 *And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them-* They hated the Lord and wanted to see Him crucified. So they were coming to ask for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. But Pilate is so desperate to get the Lord off, so screaming was his conscience, that he misread the situation and grasped at this tradition of releasing a prisoner, hoping the Jews would want their King released and not crucified. Actually his offer only fomented their passions the more. According to Lk. 23:16, Pilate attempted to take the decision out of their hands by saying that Jesus was to be the prisoner to be released; and this also had the effect of piquing their desire for His crucifixion the more. For nobody, especially a mob, likes to feel railroaded out of their desired outcome at the last moment.

15:9 *And Pilate answered them saying: Will you have me release to you the King of the Jews?-* This word for "release" is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at

baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

15:10 *For he knew that because of envy the chief priests had delivered him up-* Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

15:11 *But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, that instead he should release Barabbas to them-* The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon

turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

15:12 *And Pilate again answered and said to them: What then shall I do to him whom you call the King of the Jews?*- This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their wish* that Jesus be crucified. See on Mt. 27:21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

15:13 *And they cried out again: Crucify him!*- When people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

15:14 *And Pilate said to them: Why? What evil has he done? But they cried out exceedingly: Crucify him!*- We see here Pilate's persuasion of the Lord's sinlessness; and how he discounted even the talk about the Lord seeking to stop tribute being given to Caesar and to start a revolution. Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

15:15 *And Pilate, wishing to calm the crowd, released to them Barabbas and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified*- As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a

slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions. Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't". All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading underfoot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every

involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

15:16 *Then the soldiers led him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole battalion-* We wonder how many of those soldiers later converted to the Lord's side. Because surely their degrading of Him was done with strong quirks of bad conscience.

15:17 *And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on him-* The thorns would have penetrated the scalp into the network of blood vessels there, producing a flow of blood onto the mock-kingly garment. We see here human nature at its most raw and primitive. That is one feature of the crucifixion accounts. They were also motivated by a desire to test His claims to royalty. He had made it clear that His Kingdom was not of this world; His teaching about the Kingdom, largely in the parables, was about life lived now under domination of the Father's principles. And yet they willingly overlooked that and focused on mocking Him as a king. We note that Babylon too is arrayed in purple (Rev. 17:4 s.w.), making her a veritable anti Christ, a fake imitation of Him.

The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruising') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord

was surely in the Lord's mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).

15:18 *And they began to salute him: Hail, King of the Jews!*- "Hail" is literally, 'Be happy'. J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)). It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and *kept on* saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

15:19 *And they hit his head with a rod and spat upon him, and kneeled down in homage to him-* The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

15:20 *And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own garments-* The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

*And they led him out to crucify him-* The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led

away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).

The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".



15:21 *And they compelled a passer-by to carry his cross, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the countryside, the father of Alexander and Rufus-* Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that

he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else...until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

15:22 *And they brought him to the place named Golgotha, which means, Place of the skull-* See on Jn. 19:25. John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

15:23 *And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not accept it-* To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that "they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).

- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.

- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The

dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.

- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that the Lord would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that we have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

15:24 *And they crucify him and part his garments among themselves, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take-* There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing

in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death since he will be looked after- we have his word for it*".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them. *By casting lots*- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation

just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable . It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four

actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which



He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

15:25 *And it was the third hour when they crucified him*- "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening

His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm...four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was

oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

15:26 *And the inscription of the charge against him read: The King of the Jews-* It was also written in Hebrew (Jn.), and putting together the gospel records, it said "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews". Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him... in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last

laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, a man full of mercy....'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
  
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.

- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.

· The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78 and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him...".

15:27 *And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right hand and one on his left-* Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him...". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting... they clothe him... they smote..." (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is

seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered... they crucify... and part... casting lots... crucified... was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened... We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb...for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophecies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: "They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one" (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into

Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them "two others" (Jn. 19:18) and "... the legs of the first and of the other" (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

*15:28 And the scripture was fulfilled, which said: And he was numbered with the transgressors-* Perhaps the idea is that in the eyes of men, the Lord was considered just another dying criminal, counted along with the two thieves. The idea of numbering might refer to some legal report of the crucifixion being made, numbering three victims. The context of Is. 53:12 is that it was through being numbered with sinners that the Lord could bare their sin. This means that sin no longer totally separates man from God; because the Lord was so identified with sinful man, feeling as a sinner although he never actually sinned. But the Hebrew idea of 'numbering' is of preparing (s.w. Dan. 1:5,10; Jonah 1:17; 4:6,7,8). Through the crucifixion experience, the Lord was prepared for His role of identification with us; and this was visually exemplified by His death amongst the worst of criminals.

*15:29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying: Ha! You that would destroy the temple and build it in three days-* The Christian life, as crucified with Christ, cannot be kept secret from the world. This is why the place of crucifixion was so public- it was near a road, for passers by spoke to the crucified Jesus (Mk. 15:29), and Simon was a passer-by coming in from the field (Gk. *agros*, Lk. 23:26). The cross confronted people in their daily living, just as it should us today. Quintillian (*Declamationes* 274) records how crucifixions were always held in the most public places where crowds would gather. For us, if we are living the crucified life with Jesus, it cannot be done in a corner. See on Rom. 4:25.

This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort



from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

15:30 *Save yourself and come down from the cross!*- All the emphasis on *save yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

15:31 *In like manner also the chief priests mocked among themselves and the scribes, saying: He saved others. Himself he cannot save!*- Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear. Many of "the elders" believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

15:32 *Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so we may see and believe! And they that were crucified with him ridiculed him-* "Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn.

6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

15:33 *And when the sixth hour had come, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour-* Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son.*

Mark's account of the crucifixion has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). See on Lk. 23:48; Jn. 19:25.

15:34 *And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? Which means: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?-*

The Greek seems to mean "Why *did* You forsake me", perhaps implying that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi"? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close

to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross "knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why have You forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

<b>14th Nissan</b>	<b>9p.m.</b>	<b>Last Supper</b>
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (the third hour")	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of

distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the

entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

### **God will not forsake His people if they are righteous**

"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)

"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)

"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)

"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)

"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the

God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

### **God will forsake His people if they sin**

"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)

"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)

"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)

"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)

"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)

"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* have You forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) have You forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It is finished*".

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God's wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body,

her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin-bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how "my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with "fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)-

exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was "a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), "the consolation of Israel", unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:

"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)

"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)

"God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)

The good news of Christ's birth was for "all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).

The Lord laid down His life "for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour... men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah's Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord's words; in this case, Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The



'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "leave (forsake) his soul in hell". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bore our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:

"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my salvation*" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God, Why hast thou forsaken me*")

"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)

"Hide not thy face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection.

"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)

"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)

"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8).

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become

realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him. Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self...in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as "Father"; but now He uses the more distant "My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But

the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink "that the Scripture might be fulfilled", or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

### **Notes**

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', *in Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

15:35 *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said: Look, he calls Elijah-* They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms... this confusion isn't surprising.

15:36 *And one ran and filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a rod and gave it to him to drink, saying: Leave him be. Let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down-* When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh...I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has

prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

15:37 *And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed his last-* Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired". For the huge significance of this, see on Lk. 23:46. The Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18); He consciously controlled the giving out of His last breath.

15:38 *And the veil of the temple was torn in two- from the top to the bottom-* The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). "From the top" indicates that this was done by God. He was no longer hidden behind ritual, stones and sacred space. The rending of the veil is clearly alluded to in Heb. 9:3; 10:19; but as noted there, we must have boldness to enter in to the holiest. We all now are to act as the High Priest, going into the very presence of God for the same of others.

15:39 *And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw how he breathed his last breath, he said: Truly this man was the Son of God-* He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him". The Lord died through an act of utter self control; consciously breathing out His last breath in the form of the words "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18).

15:40 *And there were also women watching from afar, among whom were both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome-* Perhaps when He crossed Kidron He would have thought back to how Asa had to separate himself from his mother in the very same place (1 Kings 15:13). The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the

mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth.

We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross. See on Jn. 19:25; Rev. 14:4.

*15:41 Who, when he was in Galilee, had also followed him and ministered to him; and many other women that also had come with him up to Jerusalem-* The connection is between following the Lord in the easier times, at the height of His popularity in Galilee; and also following Him when all seems hopeless, and there seems absolutely no human advantage from identity with Him. The reference to "many" women coming up to Jerusalem in support of Him would suggest that He may have had more female supporters than male.

*15:42 And when evening had come, because it was the Preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath-* This confirms that the Lord died at the same time as the Passover lambs were slain; just as He had planned. His "last supper" was therefore a Passover held in advance.

*15:43 Joseph of Arimathaea, a councillor of honourable rank, who also was looking for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus-* Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel. He was 'also' a disciple (Mt.), in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their

discipleship (Mt. 27:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publicly, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man; for only close family members could ask for the body. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It

seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out



from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

15:44 *And Pilate wondered if he were already dead, and called the centurion. He asked him whether he was already dead-* Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller (*The Bible As History* p. 356) explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). if the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed". It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostal muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile... is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others... which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?". In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death. Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth

me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 38:10; 73:26).

15:45 *And when it was confirmed by the centurion, he granted the corpse to Joseph-* We get the impression that the one thing Joseph wanted was to be given the crucified body of the Lord. And we are each "given" just that, as memorialized in the communion service. His body is given for each of us, and we should realize that it ought to cost us every penny we have and all our standing in society.

15:46 *And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock-* Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasize his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

*And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb-* This apparently needless detail is added because the camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

15:47 *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where he was laid-* They didn't stay there long, but the camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

# MARK CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him-* As noted on Jn., Joseph had bought a huge amount of spices to anoint the Lord, far more than used even for the burials of the Caesars. But the women still bought some more. They too made their sacrifice, in order to anoint the Lord. This all arose from their abiding belief that He was Jesus the Christ, the anointed one; and their duty was therefore to anoint Him. Belief in the Lord Jesus as Christ can roll off the tongue and be apparently painless; but it demanded all for Joseph and the women.

16:2 *And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun was risen, they went to the tomb-* The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave

early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul *is* to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

16:3 *And they were talking among themselves: Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*- The women who came to the garden tomb weren't looking for the risen Lord; they came to anoint the body. But their love of the Lord was counted to them as seeking Him (Mt. 28:5). Here's an example of our prayers and needs being answered whilst we are yet speaking. They worried about what had already been sorted!

16:4 *And looking up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled aside*- "Looking up" enables us to see them walking with their heads down in sadness. The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water, the gift of the Spirit, which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

They apparently didn't see the Angel sitting on the stone who is mentioned in Mt. 27:2. Perhaps the Divine plan was that they ought to have been searching for the empty tomb and rejoiced on finding it; and believed without the revelation of Angels. But eventually they needed the Angelic revelations. We too can walk by Angels sitting on stones...

16:5 *And entering into the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed*- If "the right side" refers to where the Lord had lain, we are invited to see Him now as enthroned superior to Angels, with them at His right hand, subject to Him. This is visual representation of what Hebrews 1 states specifically.

16:6 *And he said to them: Do not be alarmed*- The idea is 'You do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because Mt. 28:8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

*You seek Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid him!*- The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them (Mt. 'I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds to the other records "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

The idea may be that He is 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?". There is no hint that the women obeyed and went to see the place where the Lord lay. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused

(Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

*16:7 Go tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see him, just as he told you-*

Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you". But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you". Perhaps what the Angel said was: "... as he told you... Lo, I have told you", thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel.

The Lord's original plan to meet them first in Galilee was changed; for He appeared to them in Jerusalem after they had first disbelieved. He was so eager to see them; and their faith and obedience was weak. This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell...* The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in Mt. 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

The urgency required was partly because the wonder of the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyse our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (Mt. 28:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

Put together the following passages:

- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

*16:8 And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid-* There has always been opposition to spreading the Gospel outside our own environment. Jonah was unwilling to take it to Nineveh, Israel failed miserably in their intended role as a missionary nation, and the apostles showed remarkable reluctance to obey the



command to take Christ into all the world in the first century. The women were told to go tell the disciples of the resurrection, but they went away and told nobody, Mark records (Mk. 16:7,8). The other records say that they did tell the disciples. There is no contradiction here; Mark's point is surely that they were reluctant to obey the great commission initially.

It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples... and they departed quickly... and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen... and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

After initially saying nothing, they did eventually tell the disciples. Matthew and Luke omit this disobedience to the Lord's command to witness. The record in a beautiful way both covers their weakness, and yet also brings it out. In fact resistance to the command to tell others, or being slow to fulfil it, is another theme of the resurrection accounts.

16:9 *Now when he had risen from the dead early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons-* One would have expected that the Lord Jesus would have first of all appeared to His dear mother, after resurrecting. His mother could so easily have taken this as yet another snub, similar to the way in which He had rebuked her for not knowing He must be in His Father's house, how He addressed her at Cana as "Woman" and asked her what He had to do with her; how He told those who informed Him that His mother was outside that all those who heard God's word were His mothers; how He said that His mother wasn't blessed for suckling Him, but rather, blessed were all those who heard God's word. And the way He chose to appear to the other Mary rather than His own mother could have

been taken by her as yet another snub. Yet these incidents weren't snubs. The Lord loved His mother, with a depth of passion and emotion that maybe we [and she] will never know. Yet He wanted the best for her spiritually. He wanted her to relate to Him for who He really was, not for who she perceived Him to be. It must have so hurt the Lord to work with her in this way. And so it is with His workings with us, as He seeks to bring us to know Him in truth. It must be hard for Him to bring distress into our lives. Yet with His dear mother, it worked. For the next we read of her, she is meeting with the rest of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), and, according to how we read Revelation 12, the Lord Himself saw her as clothed with the sun in glory, responsible for the birth of Himself as the man child, who would bring the Kingdom of God on earth. She made it in the end.

Mary Magdalene was the least qualified to be a witness. Women's testimony was not accepted in the Roman world; and Mary had previously been seriously 'demon possessed', probably referring to mental illness. And in addition to that she had worked as a prostitute. Yet she was the one chosen by the Lord as His star witness. We should not therefore worry about our own apparent inadequacy as witnesses. The Lord delights to use our inadequacies in this work of witness.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that "a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar". And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex". And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

16:10 *She went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept-* The account of the disciples' response to the realisation of the resurrection shows perfectly how men will rise above every barrier, both within them and without, to speak the good news of what they now realise to be absolute truth. Mary, bashful ex-hooker that she was, "went and told them that had been with him", the broken-down women "with great joy... did run to bring his disciples word", those on the Emmaus road "went and told it unto the residue", "the other disciples *therefore*" told Thomas, John told Peter "It is the Lord", and finally they all "went forth, and preached everywhere" the news of the resurrection

(Mt. 28:8; Mk. 16:10,13,20; Jn. 20:25; 21:7). The speed and spirit of the narrative pounds away at a major theme: The natural desire to tell others the Gospel of the Lord's resurrection. This same spirit of *urgently* passing on good news pervades the preaching recorded in Acts.

Note that the disciples are described as "weeping" for the loss of Jesus, the Greek word meaning specifically to weep aloud (Mk. 16:10). And yet the Lord appears to them in that state and upbraids them for not believing His words and for having *hard* hearts (Mk. 16:14). Faith is so crucial- and for all their *love* of Him, they didn't have much *faith* in Jesus. Are there similarities with ourselves? Do we on one hand love Him, and yet remain hard hearted to His words?

16:11 *And they, when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, disbelieved-* There is a strong theme in the Gospels that the disciples repeatedly disbelieved the news of the resurrection. And yet they were appealing for people to believe the message of the Lord's resurrection and be baptized into it. But they made that appeal on the basis of their own weakness and slowness to believe. They considered it "Idle talk" (Lk. 24:11), which means literally the talk of the crazy. They assumed this was a story of the once demon-possessed Mary Magdalene, an outcome of her previous mental disturbance. When the Lord had so clearly foretold His resurrection. Luke is pointing out their own disbelief, implying it was almost to the point of blasphemy. Each of the Gospel writers brings out a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways.

16:12 *And after these things he was manifested in another guise to two of them as they walked on their way into the countryside-* The two could well have been Cleopas and his wife Mary, who had been at the crucifixion (see on Lk. 24:13). We wonder why He appeared in various forms which as it were disguised Him. Perhaps this was because He wanted them to believe with a minimum of miracle; He wanted them, as He wants us, to join the dots and believe, rather than having His in-your-face revelation directly to as it were force belief. And maybe the lesson was also that the same Lord can reveal Himself to us in different ways and forms through the persons of various ordinary people. Note too that *morphe*, "guise" or "form", does not refer to His essential nature, but to His appearance and deportment. This is valuable to bear in mind when considering the usage of *morphe* in Phil. 2 "the form of God".

16:13 *And they went away, and told it to the rest, who did not believe them either-* Although the disciples accepted that Jesus had appeared to Simon, they didn't believe the account of Cleopas and his friend. The record emphasizes their refusal to believe- and then goes on to appeal to the hearers or readers of their message to learn from their slowness, and

to believe and be baptized (:16). Their stubborn refusal to believe is so emphasized.

16:14 *And later he was manifested to the eleven themselves as they were eating; and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those that had seen him after he had risen-*  
The Lord "upbraided" the disciples for their immaturity and unbelief concerning His cross and resurrection. The Greek word is always used in a very severe context of 'reviling' (Mt. 5:11; 11:20; 27:44; Rom. 15:3; 1 Tim. 4:10); it's a tough and abusive word. It appears out of place when applied to the Lord. Yet what it indicates is that the Lord was so angry with them for not believing the witness of the women. Discounting people's experience of Jesus merely on account of their gender or background was so angering to the Lord. And He's the same today.

A read through the Gospels reveals the deep frustration and anger of the Lord Jesus because of the blindness of the disciples. Mark's record brings this out especially. The following comments by the Lord, almost under His breath, were all made within a matter of days of each other: "Peter said, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand?... do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand? Perceive ye not yet... having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?... how is it that ye do not understand?... O faithless generation, *how long* shall I be with you? *how long* shall I suffer you? (with reference to the disciples' faithlessness)... the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth (i.e. responded) *again*, and saith unto them, Children ...and they were astonished out of measure... Jesus went before them: and they were amazed... and he took *again* the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen... Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask" (Mt. 15:17; 16:9; Mk. 8:18,21; 9:19; 10:1,24-32). Notice the stress on "how long" and "yet". The Lord clearly was disappointed at the slow rate of development. Their blindness was an agony to Him. Especially does this come out in His attitude to the disciples after His resurrection. The exalted Son of God, *the Son of God*, poured out His anger on those eleven men. You get the sense of them cowering before the presence of a super-human intellect, beneath a force of personality that could concuss men when turned against them. He *upbraided* them for their lack of perception, their lack of understanding (Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:25). As I read the record of this, there's part of me that feels so sorry for them. Thoughts of sympathy skate through my mind: *they weren't a bad crowd... only ordinary men... just poor little human beings down here on earth... only men... only human beings... limited by their own nature*. But this wasn't how the Lord saw it at all. He was angry with them. The picture of the Son of God, the exalted Son of man with eyes as a flame of fire, upbraiding His friends, those he had died for... because they hadn't

understood something which he knew and they knew had been within their power to. The picture is awesome.

The experience of emotion on reflection at the Lord's sufferings can be yet another area where our spirituality isn't genuine. The scene of those 11 grown men mourning and weeping at the loss of their Lord makes me think 'They were a soft hearted lot really, behold how they loved him...'. But then the Lord appears to them and upbraids them for being *hard* hearted and indifferent to His words (Mk. 16:10,14). His upbraiding of them must have really hurt- for they must have been sure that they were anything but hard hearted towards Him.

The even greater commission to go into all the world with the Gospel followed straight on from Christ upbraiding the eleven "with their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mk. 16:14,15). That 'upbraiding' must have left them wallowing in their weakness. It would have been quite something. The Son of God upbraiding His friends. But straight on from that: "Go ye... go ye into all the world" (Mt. cp. Mk. shows "go ye" was said twice). And He told them to preach that those who believed not would be damned- after having just told them that they were men who believed not. Mark's record stresses three times in the lead up to this that they "believed not"; and then, he records how they were told to go and preach condemnation on those who believed not (Mk. 16:11,13,14,16). They were humbled men who did that. The idea of taking the Gospel world-wide was in fact alluding to Is. 66:17-20. Here those who are spared the 'Gehenna' of the last day judgment will have a sign placed on them, as upon Cain, and they will then be sent "unto the nations...and they shall declare my glory among the gentiles". The rejection process glorifies God's righteous Name, and this world-wide exhibition of the rejected will actually bring men "out of all nations" (:20) to God, just as Israel's condemnation was an "instruction" unto the surrounding nations. The connection shows that in our obedience to the great commission, we go forth as condemned men who in our case, like the disciples, have known the wonder of grace.

16:15- see on Mk. 14:9.

*And he said to them: You are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation-* The essential spirit of the great commission was "Go!", following on as it does from the repeated commands to "go" and share the glorious news that Christ had risen. And yet so many congregations of believers seem to stress instead "Come in to us!". And every manner of carrot is dangled before the public to entice them to 'come in' to some church event. But the emphasis was clearly, and should still be, upon 'going' to people. Our turning of 'Go!' into 'Come to us' is all part of a wider picture, whereby the group of hard core, desperate men who first followed Jesus, the whores, the gamblers, the mentally ill, the

marginalized women... have all been diluted into a religion of conformists, a spiritual bubble in which we risk nothing, sacrifice nothing, and comfortably continue in the way of our fathers who were also members of the same church as we are.

The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. We are to preach to "all the world" (16:15)- the *kosmos*. In the last days, the Gospel will go to "all nations"- every *ethnos* (Mk. 13:10). The parallel record in Mt. 24:14 has Jesus saying that it must go to the whole world- *oikoumene*. What did He actually say? I suggest He used both words, in an emphasis of just how universal the witness would be: 'The Gospel will be preached in the whole *oikoumene*, yes, to every *ethnos*...'. This is all some emphasis- every creature (individual), in the whole world system, every part of society (*kosmos*), of every nation (*ethnos*), on the whole planet (*oikoumene*) was to have the message. And this is our unmistakable mandate. The number of different words used by the Lord was surely intentional.

As so often with reading the Gospels, it is profitable to imagine the tone of voice in which the Lord spoke the words which are recorded. "Go ye *into all the world* and preach the gospel to *every creature*". If only we could sense the intensity of desire, the deepness of spiritual meaning, which His voice would have conveyed. We *must* have the spiritual ambition to take the Gospel to the whole world- no matter how small our world may be. The world of our street, of our town, nation- and as far as we are able, the whole planet. Paul had this ambition, quite apart from any personal commission he received.

The great commission is framed in language which picks up on the descriptions of the Lord's own preaching earlier in His ministry. His idea clearly enough is that He will no longer be on earth; therefore His people must be 'Him' to the whole earth:

**The great commission to us**

Make disciples (Mt. 28:19)

Preach the Gospel, teach people (Mk. 16:15)

Proclaim repentance (Lk. 24:47)

Forgive and retain sins (Jn. 20:23)

**The personal preaching of Jesus**

Made disciples (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11)

Proclaimed the Gospel (Lk. 4:18), taught people (Mk. 6:30)

Proclaimed repentance (Mk. 1:15)

Forgave sins (Mt. 9:1-9; Mk. 2:1-12)

Retained sins (Jn. 8:21-24;  
9:41)

Witnessed to others in  
obedience to the great  
commission (Acts 1:8)

Cast out demons, heal (Mk.  
16:16)

Witnessed what he had seen  
and heard (Jn. 3:11)

Cast out demons (Mk. 3:15;  
6:7,13), healed (Mk. 6:13)

*16:16 He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieves shall be condemned-* In the very context of the Lord upbraiding them for their slowness to believe the Gospel of His death and resurrection, they were asked to go and teach others that he who didn't believe this same message would be damned (Mk. 16:15,16). Their witness, as it is recorded in the Gospel records, is therefore shot through with recognition of their own weakness. They record how Peter their leader was described by the Lord as a "satan" (Mk. 8:33). They were good fishermen- yet their records show that never do they record themselves as catching a fish without their Lord's help. In this they set a model for our witness; it must be shot through with a full recognition of our weakness, our own struggles to believe that which we invite others to believe. And the more real, the more credible. Not only did the Gospel writers portray their own weakness and slowness to believe; they write in such a way as to minimize their own personalities and presence. They don't continually harp on about the fact they were really present.

*16:17 And these signs shall accompany them that believe- in my name shall they cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues-* All the "they shall" clauses in :17 and :18 were fulfilled in various examples of Divine protection to the early preachers of the Gospel. "If they drink any deadly thing..." is worded in a conditional way, and we have no Biblical example of this happening, although traditions exist of various apostles being unharmed by poison.

*16:18 They shall pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no way hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover-* See on :17. In Old Testament times, God described His whole people as His anointed one, His Christ: "The Lord is a strength unto his people, and he is the saving strength of his anointed" (Ps. 28:8 RVmg.). The whole people were His anointed King, His Messiah, the anointed one. And so it is for all those today who are "in Christ". Thus the prophecy about Christ personally that He would tread upon snakes and wild animals (Ps. 91:13) is quoted as being fulfilled in the disciples, who 'were' Christ on their preaching mission (Lk. 10:19; Mk. 16:18).

Not being hurt alludes to the promise of how the restored Israel would be in Is. 43:2. Those somewhat confused men and women were now the new Israel.

*16:19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God-* The emphasis is therefore on the fact that the great commission was His last word to His people; after He spoke that, He was received into Heaven. We might expect to read that He 'ascended', but Mark's focus is on His being received into heaven. The ceremony of His 'receiving into heaven' is recorded in more detail in Revelation 4 and 5. Paul alludes here in saying that the Lord was received up into glory (1 Tim. 3:16). The cloud which "received" Him (Lk. 24:51; Acts 1:9) was therefore a cloud of glory. It was a sign of His acceptance by God, visible to the watching disciples.

The Ethiopic text brings out the reality more strongly: "Our Lord, the Lord Jesus" was received up to "his own Father". Our man is now there in Heaven, with His Father. He is God's right hand man, functioning as God without being God the Father Himself. As noted on Acts 7:56, the Lord is seated at God's right hand; but He stands up in passion and intercession for His people on earth. He is not in that sense sedentary, passively sitting.

*16:20 And they went and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen-* Luke has the disciples returning to Jerusalem and focusing upon praise of their ascended Lord; Mark focuses upon their obedience to the great commission, the Lord's last word to them. That witness was made, as ours should be, in a spirit of homage and praise to the Lord Jesus. And He who was now in Heaven worked with them in their witness. Any obedience to the great commission will result in a definite sense of the Lord's working with us, even if the form of confirmation of our word has changed from miraculous gifts to more subtle forms of Spirit manifestation. The same word for 'working with' is used in 2 Cor. 6:1, again in the context of evangelism, when Paul remarks that the Lord Jesus is a worker together with "us". The promise of His co-working with us is not therefore limited to the disciples who first heard Him.